

# DISCUSSION PAPER

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## Global Leadership for Nutrition: The UN's Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) and its Contributions

Richard Longhurst  
July 2010

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Richard Longhurst

### Summary

The UN's Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) has been functioning for more than 30 years. The SCN fulfils many different functions according to those who work within its structure, there having been many formal efforts to define what it does. But since its inauguration in April 1977, taking over from the UN's Protein Advisory Group, it has provided a forum for debate, sharing of experiences and reaching of consensus on how to reduce undernutrition and other damaging nutrition problems. The SCN is a 'big tent' comprising UN agencies, governments, academia and civil society, exchanging information, networking and informal harmonisation of activities. It has provided a valuable series of publications in the work areas of its constituents, as well as the authoritative Reports on the World Nutrition Situation, and its continuing publications of *SCN News* and Nutrition in Crisis Situation Reports. It has provided a scientific forum to resolve some of the more contentious nutrition issues.

Over its 30 plus years of activities, the SCN has sometimes been a contentious body. But nutrition and the actions needed to resolve its problems require a broad range of activities and actions, across different disciplines and types of actors. The main constituents have strongly held and often divergent views. This history records the ups and downs of the SCN and shows where it has been able to proceed with consensus and where it has not. The history also provides an inventory of SCN activities and timeline, its publications and public events. Although the importance of nutrition in development has not been given the prominence it deserves, there is considerable current interest, and it is hoped that this history will help constructively in this current examination of the international nutrition landscape.

**Keywords:** UN agencies; nutrition; policy coordination; bilateral donors; NGOs; reporting of research and field experiences.

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# Preface

The UN's Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) is now more than 30 years old and this history has been written to contribute to the continuing debate on the international nutrition landscape. It builds on a draft written by Professor George Beaton in March 1998, which covered the first 21 years of the SCN. In addition to this earlier draft, the history is based on three other sources. First is the information and recollections provided by over 40 informants, some interviewed during the SCN's 33rd Session in Geneva in March 2006 and 34th Session in Rome in February 2007 (including feedback from a presentation made at this Session), others by telephone; second, by a review of SCN files carried out in periods between December 2006 and November 2009, and third, reviews of drafts by key informants in 2008 and 2009.

Although many informants have provided support to the development of the History, they are still a small proportion of those involved with the SCN over the last 30 years. Therefore, acknowledging some and not others is awkward. But thanks are especially due to the SCN Chairs, Secretaries and staff who supported this project, the reviewers of this monograph, and in particular Professor Sir Richard Jolly (chair of the SCN, 1995–2000) who encouraged the completion of the Beaton draft, in line with his enthusiasm which many share for documenting the activities and unique contributions of the UN system.

Professor Beaton generously allowed full use of his draft. Apologies are offered in advance for the inevitable errors of fact, omission and interpretation that have been made, despite the wide range of sources consulted. These errors are the sole responsibility of the author. Often very different views on the same event were offered. The author's declaration of interest is that he has worked as staff member or consultant (between October 1971 and August 2009) for six of the UN agencies that have provided financial support to the SCN and on occasions has worked as consultant for the SCN itself. He was lead consultant for the FAO/WHO International Conference on Nutrition, 1991–1992. These involvements have made him aware of the SCN's weaknesses as well as its strengths and accomplishments. He carried out a limited evaluation of the SCN in 2006–07, funded by the SCN, and his most recent work has involved UN reform and external organisational evaluations of UN agencies. Further support and funds for the research and publication of this history have come from sources not linked to the SCN. Named quotations provided in the text appear with the permission of the respondent.

As this draft was moving into its final stages the author was saddened to hear of the death of Sol Chafkin who was instrumental in shaping the early years of the SCN and was also an enlightened and supportive supervisor of the author in the early part of his career. Therefore, this history of the SCN is dedicated to Sol.

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March 2010



# Acronyms

ACC	Administrative Committee on Coordination of the UN
AGN	Advisory Group on Nutrition
ATAC	American Technical Assistance Corporation
BAPPENAS	National Development Planning Agency, Indonesia
BMGF	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Development Cooperation
CCPOQ	ACC Consultative Committee on Programmes and Operational Questions
CEB	Chief Executives Board
CFS	Committee on Food Security
CGD	Centre for Global Development
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CODEX	Codex Alimentarius Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG	Director General
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
DSE	German Foundation for International Development
ECHUI	Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GAIN	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HLPC	High Level Committee on Programmes
HNP	Health, Nutrition and Population
HOLN	Health Organization of the League of Nations
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICCIDD	International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders
ICN	International Conference on Nutrition
IDD	Iodine Deficiency Disorders
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute

INACG	International Nutritional Anemia Consultative Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ILSI	International Life Sciences Institute
IPSC	Interim Programme Steering Committee
IUNS	International Union of Nutritional Sciences
IVACG	International Vitamin A Consultative Group
LNS	<i>Lancet</i> Nutrition Series
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MI	Micronutrient Initiative
MICS	Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NICS	Nutrition Information in Crisis Situations
OMNI	Opportunities for Micronutrient Intervention
PAG	Protein Advisory Group (UN)
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PAMM	Programme Against Micronutrient Malnutrition
PEM	Protein-Energy Malnutrition
RNIS	Refugee Nutrition Information System
RWNS	Reports on the World Nutrition Situation
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SCN	Standing Committee on Nutrition (formerly Sub Committee on Nutrition)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNDAF	UN Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNHCHR	UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNU	UN University
USI	Universal Salt Iodisation
WANAHR	World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights
WFC	World Food Council
WFP	World Food Programme
WG	Working Group
WHO	World Health Organization

# 1 Global nutrition: five reports on the world nutrition situation

‘The United Nations was not created to take humanity to heaven, but to save it from hell’

Dag Hammarskjöld

‘Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them’

George Santayana

## 1.1 Thirty years of the SCN, the Paris Declaration, UN reform and the nutrition landscape

The Standing Committee on Nutrition passed its 30th birthday in April 2007. Its mandate was established in April 1977 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. These 30 years plus operating as coordinating body for a subject which is shared between UN agencies is good reason to try and document how the SCN has performed, what we can learn from this, to look back and look forward to its continued existence. But there are other good reasons for writing a history. The UN is under examination with pressure for reform and strengthening of its operations and performance. The debate over UN reform is intense, and signs of this are the results and report of a High Level Panel convened in 2006, by former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, to generate ‘stronger system-wide coherence across the various development-related agencies, funds and programmes of the UN’. This report, known as the Coherence Report, was published in November 2006.<sup>1</sup> The implementation of these and other approaches are priorities of the current UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon. The impetus for better coherence among UN agencies has come as much from the UN internally, driven by the previous Secretary General, as from the external donors of the UN.

The Paris Declaration<sup>2</sup> is also a product of the need for better effectiveness in international aid, with five components: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results and mutual accountability. This historical review of the SCN will provide some reflections on these areas, in particular harmonisation. In addition, since 2006, there have been several re-assessments of the international nutrition architecture in which the role of the SCN will be central. This review should be helpful in that process.

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1 *Delivering as One: Report of the High Level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment*, UN, Report to the 61st Session of the General Assembly, A/61/583, November 2006.

2 OECD, *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (2005) and the *Accra Agenda for Action* (2008), Paris.

Therefore, the experiences of the SCN have much to contribute to understanding how to achieve better harmonisation and coherence across UN agencies. The SCN has been a vehicle for over 30 years, seeking to achieve some of the very results which the harmonisation process is trying to achieve. The SCN has stirred debate, held consultations and published reports and newsletters, which have often lead to action. Some of the questions that will guide this history have been borrowed from the framework proposed by the UN Intellectual History project.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 The unique nature of nutrition as an area for professions, policy and practice

A history of the SCN also provides some insights as to what is needed for ideas, policies and action to combine in support of nutrition. Action on nutrition is fascinating to review because it is in the hands of so many different actors and organisations, both in UN agencies, other international organisations, government ministries, NGOs, academia and the private sector. There is no one lead UN agency for nutrition, nor do donors have self-standing departments of nutrition, and nor are sectoral ministries in either developed or developing countries organised around nutrition. The debate around how nutrition progresses as part of economic and social development has been endless for about 40 years at least,<sup>4</sup> mostly without clear consensus.<sup>5</sup> Yet improving health and hunger, of which nutrition is the major element, is always enshrined in any proclamation of action about alleviating world poverty, most notably in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which run to 2015, where this history 'ends'.

Nutrition figures centrally in many of the MDGs. The Goal of MDG 1 is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, with two targets: halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 per day, and second, halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger; and good nutrition is crucial for the attainment of other MDGS, being No 3, gender equality, No 4, to reduce child mortality, No 5, to improve maternal health and No 6, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

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3 The UN History identified four ways in which ideas in the UN can make an impact on development by: (i) changing the perception of key issues or situations in development; (ii) helping define an agenda for action; (iii) providing the basis for new alliances, including with NGOs, which can serve to mobilise action or alter government perceptions of their own interests; and (iv) possibly becoming institutionalised in some new or existing organisation, which helps to take the idea forward into action. The SCN has made contributions in all of these areas.

4 An excellent reference for these issues among the three UN agencies of FAO, WHO and UNICEF is Ruxin (1996).

5 A major and early milestone for many reading this report will be the MIT Conference on Nutrition and National Development in September 1971. See Berg, Scrimshaw and Call (1973).

### 1.3 SCN as accelerator, promoter and harmoniser

Born in adversity, shaped by controversy, the SCN rose from the ashes of the United Nations Protein Advisory Group (PAG) to become a central focal point for nutrition in the UN system. What has been its impact on the betterment of the human condition in developing countries? Many things have happened because the SCN took actions that fostered and encouraged activities, some in the hands of others. These are listed on the following page. Less obvious but still very important have been a series of actions by the SCN that have had the spin-off effect of promoting and aiding what is now a very strong network of NGOs and others involved in international nutrition, especially those involved in emergency activities and in empowering refugees, perhaps one step removed but with an explicit focus on nutrition. There have been some 'slow burners': ideas raised in SCN fora that have progressed to the wider mainstream over time (see section 5 on the Third Era). Reading through all of the newsletters and publications shows the huge amount of nutrition territory that the SCN has covered, albeit on very slender resources.

Often the impact of the SCN on international nutrition has been indirect and subtle. In terms of harmonisation of activities and ultimate impact, as a non-operational UN institution, the SCN has a good track record. It has mattered and all those involved with it should be positive about what they have collectively accomplished. This includes not only the SCN's formal members – UN agencies, bilateral agencies, members of the former Advisory Group on Nutrition (AGN) but the many others who have participated in the SCN meetings and activities.

### 1.4 Six notable features

There are six notable features of the SCN which would not have been developed without its existence. These are the:

- Reports on the World Nutrition Situation, now with five volumes and the sixth near completion;
- Important series of SCN Working Groups comprising UN agencies, governments, academia and civil society that function as a forum for exchange of information, for networking and informal harmonisation of activities;
- The SCN has strong convening power: at least once per year, persons representing governments, UN agencies, bilateral agencies, NGOs, universities and persons from the broader nutrition community come together to discuss matters of common concern;
- Valuable series of SCN workshops and publications on work areas of member agencies, and of interest to broader communities of workers at country level or the scientific and academic community training future workers;

- Country and programme reviews and the workshops convened at IUNS Congresses to address the question ‘What works where?’ and;
- Two continuing publications: *SCN News* and the Nutrition in Crisis Situation Reports (originally called the Refugee Nutrition Information System) with updates on the refugee situation.

### **1.5 But across the spectrum of opinion, the view is mixed**

However, not everybody has been so positive about the work and role of the SCN. Some brand it as ‘just a talking shop’. One reason for this is that the SCN ‘big tent’ includes people with very widely divergent views on how to approach nutrition problems. But there is no common view as to what would make the SCN more effective, as the considerable discussion on a new nutrition global architecture from 2007–2009 has shown. It now serves several communities: UN Agencies, ‘aid recipient’ governments, multilaterals, bilateral donor agencies, the academic community, and civil society at least, and they all have differing views. When any of these constituencies were asked about new forms the SCN might take, these were often rejected on the basis of being an intrusion on their mandate, or clashing with their governance structure. But everyone agrees that the SCN Secretariat has rarely been adequately funded to allow it to achieve what its critics want to see done.

### **1.6 But transaction costs in terms of discord have been high**

Moreover, at times there has been a high human cost. These accomplishments, often expressed outside the actual domain of the SCN, have been accompanied by much internal discord within the SCN forum and by major attempts to restructure or refocus or even abolish, the SCN. Respondents said that the SCN and its constituent agencies are currently experiencing a harmonious period. But the internal torments and external accomplishments of the SCN are so intertwined that both must be presented together to see how the SCN has evolved through distinct eras. Again much of this is based on different views as to how nutrition is to be addressed.

## **2 Prehistory: the PAG: 1955–1977 (and before)<sup>6</sup>**

The SCN followed in the footsteps of an earlier UN group directly concerned with nutrition. This was the Protein Advisory Group (PAG). The PAG was conceived by a small group of very prominent nutritionists known for their interests in international as well as domestic nutrition. Two events are reported as developing the PAG: the first was a meeting of 30 biochemists, nutritionists, paediatricians and scientists in Princeton, New Jersey in 1955 and

reported by William Darby (Darby 1975). In addition, Nevin Scrimshaw remembers well that the idea was coined by Drs. Darby, Sebrell, Gyorgy and Maurice Pate at an informal weekend meeting in Dr Sebrell's home in Long Island. The idea was presented to Dr Candau (Director General, WHO). WHO took the initiative, UNICEF became a co-sponsor, and FAO joined in supporting the formation of the PAG. Other agencies added their support later. The first *PAG Bulletin* appeared in January 1956, designed and prepared by its six members: Messrs Darby, Gyorgy, King, Sebrell, Holt and Platt (who all worked in related capacities on other committees).

In November 1974, the World Food Conference mobilised political leaders, planners, scientists and public opinion to deal with ways to overcome the very serious food and nutrition problem affecting a large proportion of the world's population. The same year the PAG's name, but not acronym, was changed from 'Protein Advisory Group of the United Nations System' to 'Protein-Calorie Advisory Group of the United Nations System' reflecting that the emphasis on protein had been badly misplaced and the change in perception of the nature of the nutrition problem.<sup>7</sup> Coincident with the name change, the sponsoring agencies (FAO, WHO, UNICEF, IBRD and the United Nations) expanded the terms of reference of the PAG:

to reflect the wider ramifications of malnutrition and to permit the group to deal more effectively with the growing range and volume of activities of the United Nations System in the field of nutrition... The subject matter to be addressed under the new terms of reference includes definition of needed nutrition policies and planning, methods and approaches to planning, analysis and advice related to programs and issues of strategy and recommendations regarding resource allocation for such programmes in these areas.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.1 Changes in the PAG Terms of Reference lead to its demise, as agencies jostled to find their role**

This important change in terms of reference may also have been the notice of execution for the PAG which held its 24th and last formal session just three years later, in January 1977. The real demand for a body like the PAG came from UNICEF when it was engaged in promotion of weaning foods and was faced with many technical issues. FAO and WHO – as specialised agencies –

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6 Ruxin's (1996) thesis has provided some excellent background material for this section.

7 On the author's bookshelf is a publication by the UK Overseas Development Administration's 'Advisory Committee on Protein' in July 1974, where the Ministerial (Judith Hart) transmittal sheet notes: '... the prevalence of debilitating diseases in developing countries is simply lack of food – any kind of food. It is not protein that provides the energy needs of the human body but the adequacy of good food of all sorts'. The membership of the Committee was Professor Sir Joseph Hutchinson (Chair), Miss Dorothy Hollingsworth (Deputy Chair), Professors Len Joy, John Waterlow, David Northcote and Alan Holmes, and Dr G. Galliver and Mr G. Evans.

8 From the *PAG Bulletin* IV, No. 3, September 1974, p1.



were unable to provide the type and range of advice that UNICEF – as a development fund – needed. At the same time, FAO and WHO strongly insisted that UNICEF could not become a technical agency, recruiting its own technical staff, and instead must depend on the technical agencies, WHO and FAO, for assistance. Formation of the PAG was seen as a logical and important approach to resolution of the serious gap in technical resources within the UN system, being complementary to, but not competitive with, the resources of FAO and WHO.

## **2.2 But there is also a pre-pre history**

International nutrition was an issue covered by the League of Nations during the 1930s (see Jolly, Emmerij, Ghai and Lapeyre 2004). The Yugoslav delegation proposed that the Health Organization of the League of Nations (HOLN) prepare a report on the food situation of some representative countries, which was done in 1935 (Burnett and Aykroyd 1935). This showed serious food shortage in poor countries but nothing was done. But there was other pressure for action. In the same year, Stanley Bruce, prime minister of Australia in the 1920s and then Australian High Commissioner for the UK proposed that the League of Nations explore what might be done for a world food plan based on human needs. This led, two years later, to the League's Mixed Committee on Nutrition producing a report (League of Nations 1937) which was widely publicised, but the beginning of the war delayed action. However, the issues were picked up again at the conference on world food problems called by President Roosevelt and held at Hot Springs in Virginia. This conference laid the foundations for the FAO, which was launched in Quebec in October 1945.

From 1948 there was a joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Nutrition, which continued to meet until disbanded in late 1974. FAO and WHO decided some collaboration was necessary as nutrition had been such a contentious area and so full of disagreements over definitions and emphasis given the experience with the work of HOLN from 1935. The Expert Committee marked the marriage of FAO and WHO nutrition work but progress in working together was slow, because of the limited resources of the two organisations and their reluctance to work jointly.

## **2.3 The PAG worked mostly to set technical criteria, but then moved towards policy and malnutrition**

Established in 1955, for 20 years the PAG effectively developed and promulgated specifications for the various potential components of weaning foods, animal and human studies to establish efficacy and safety, and so on. Many of the specifications and guidelines remain in use to this day by UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR, various national bodies, and even CODEX. Gradually the PAG moved away from a narrow focus on design and testing of foods, and more towards programmes involving the use of the foods.



The PAG grew with generous resources because of the infectious enthusiasm for protein research and its membership swelled in the late 1950s to include the top nutritionists from developing countries, many of whom shared a concern for weaning foods.

Later it shifted towards economic and policy areas impinging on problems of malnutrition. This shift was recognised by the sponsoring agencies when they approved the expanded terms of reference cited above. According to the respondents, this evolution had found encouragement from one of its sponsors, the World Bank, and opposition from another, FAO, with a relatively unconcerned stance from the others.

## 2.4 But the PAG became too detached from the agencies

As the PAG changed from a technical body with a narrowly defined mission, its membership lost specific technical expertise and it was argued in the aftermath of the World Food Conference, that the PAG was no longer needed<sup>9</sup> – that the agencies had their own competence in the areas which the PAG was then championing. The PAG had an independent, open and critical voice through its publication, the *PAG Bulletin*, and was a serious thorn in the side of some agencies. Senior staff at FAO, WHO and UNICEF believed that the PAG had some successes, but the enthusiastic emphasis on protein was seen as becoming badly misplaced: the sixth Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Nutrition in 1962 was concerned that the protein focus was excessive.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps critically important, the PAG was independent of the sponsoring agencies and was losing touch with those agencies. This was a limitation seen as making the committee unworkable and a restructuring was proposed by the agencies, with these agencies constituting the SCN being the core of any activity after the reorganisation.<sup>11</sup>

In 1973 a PAG statement on ‘The Protein Problem’ clashed with the protein views of the FAO/WHO Ad Hoc Expert Committee on Protein and Calorie Requirements. Given the membership of some on both the committee and the PAG, the conflict highlighted the rifts in the nutrition community.<sup>12</sup> All of this resulted in a decision to terminate the PAG. It was to wind up its activities by the end of 1977.

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9 Indeed, the PAG in June 1974 had not even been consulted in preparation for the World Food Conference. After some protest, PAG ideas were solicited and in October 1974 they received an invitation. But the PAG was virtually excluded from the Conference. A similar event was to happen 18 years later with the non-consultation with the SCN over participation in the eventual structure of the International Conference on Nutrition in August and December 1992.

10 Documented by Ruxin (1996).

11 Contributed by Mr E.J.R. Heyward.

12 See Ruxin (1996: 250).

## 2.5 At about this time, the World Bank entered the nutrition scene

The entry of the World Bank from 1972 into investing in nutrition projects was a milestone. The President of the Bank, Robert McNamara was on the Board of the Brookings Institute and attended a seminar on nutrition there, based on the work of Alan Berg, Senior Fellow at the Institute.<sup>13</sup> This kindled an interest by the Bank in nutrition, leading to a scoping strategy report by three consultants working for the American Technical Assistance Corporation and reporting to Dr Shlomo Reutlinger in the Development Economics Department.<sup>14</sup> For 30 years FAO, WHO and UNICEF had dominated international nutrition in the UN. Now the World Bank joined the PAG as a sponsoring agency (with Alan Berg representing) and in 1973 broad inter-agency discussions began. But its initial allocations to nutrition were modest and Bank nutrition projects did not get underway until 1977. Relations between the four agencies remained tense as they tried to fit collaborative working into their agency mandates. The World Bank could bring more funds to addressing nutrition than other agencies could contribute, which in turn generates a certain attitude towards action. This was to be a source of occasional conflict in the SCN.

## 2.6 A new structure to harmonise the activities of the UN agencies

Some structure that might help harmonise the activities of the UN agencies was, however, needed to replace the PAG. The ACC had been asked to respond to Resolution 5 of the World Food Conference and, after requesting a year's postponement, presented ECOSOC with a proposal that would create a Subcommittee on Nutrition of the ACC.<sup>15</sup> The then-Chair of the PAG, Dr Joaquin Cravioto (of the Children's Hospital of Mexico), wrote a very strong letter to the heads of all of the PAG-sponsoring agencies advising of the shortcomings of the ACC proposal and urging careful reconsideration of the proposal before action. Politically difficult questions were asked by member governments in the ECOSOC forum. The matter was referred back to the ACC and the PAG was invited to offer its input into any revision of institutional arrangements relating to nutrition.

There was wide support in ECOSOC for the proposal to establish a Sub-Committee on Nutrition as a central body intended to achieve a much closer

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13 At the time Alan Berg was Senior Fellow in the Brookings Foreign Policy Studies Programme and Belding Scholar of the Foundation for Child Development. His work at Brookings was published as Berg with Muscat (1973).

14 ATAC Report, *A Review of Possible World Bank Actions on Malnutrition Problems*, January 1972. The authors were Sol Chafkin, last Chairmen of the PAG, Alan Berg and soon to be appointed as Nutrition Adviser at the World Bank, Jim Pines who had a distinguished career working on international nutrition problems, and the author of this review, Richard Longhurst, just out of graduate school at Cornell University's Department of Agricultural Economics and then research assistant to Shlomo Reutlinger as the most junior member.

15 Food problems, institutional arrangements relating to nutrition: statement of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, ECOSOC E/5805, 28 April 1976.

harmonisation of assistance, activities and policies relating to nutrition matters within the UN system through strong agency representation and consultations with member governments. It was envisaged that the Committee would be the place for agencies to present their policies and approaches on nutritional issues in order to foster 'compatible decisions'.

It was also suggested that a 'nutrition advisory panel' would succeed the PAG and provide advice, when requested to the proposed SCN. This was to be the Advisory Group on Nutrition (AGN), which would replace the functions of the PAG. The set-up of the AGN advising the SCN meant that nutritionists would be several steps away from the policies they wished to influence: the PAG had been able to communicate directly with agency heads. As pointed out by Ruxin (1996: 298), for the first time, the UN agencies were producing a framework that reflected their viewpoints and nutritional expertise. The Chair of the PAG, Joachin Cravioto, resigned in September 1976.

However, under the procedural rules of the time, an ACC sub-committee would be composed of representatives from interested agencies, would meet *in camera* and need never produce public reports or minutes. Indeed, there would be no requirement that it ever meet and, outside the agencies themselves, no one would necessarily know if it had met or not.

## 2.7 Winding up the PAG

The final meeting of the PAG<sup>16</sup> (January 1977 in New York) was devoted to the task of commenting on the institutional arrangements; Sol Chafkin served as Acting Chair, and it was attended by the UN, WHO, FAO, UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP, and the World Food Council (WFC) as well as representatives of several bilaterals, (being Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (almost all sending two or three representatives to the meeting) in addition to PAG members. Prominent issues in the discussion and recommendations were the need for:

- a body to discuss and attempt to harmonise activities of the UN agencies;
- an external (to the UN agencies) advisory group; and
- a small *permanent* secretariat to serve both the needs of the Sub Committee on Nutrition and its advisory group, and effective links with the bilaterals.

The meeting prepared a specific short statement of the PAG members' views for presentation to the ACC and ECOSOC. The agencies would have their voice through the ACC and the bilaterals could continue to speak through their governments at ECOSOC, or if necessary through government representatives at the governing councils of the independent UN agencies. After approval, the Chair was directed to send copies of the statement to the heads of sponsoring

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16 A meeting of PAG committees, but not the full PAG was held in Geneva in May 1977.

agencies and to the ACC which was to meet the following week. All of this was done.<sup>17</sup>

The ACC responded<sup>18</sup> indicating that there were still some differences about institutional arrangements for nutrition among its members; therefore, it was not possible to invite Mr Chafkin to appear before ECOSOC. In the UNICEF response, Harry Labouisse, the Executive Director of UNICEF reported that UNICEF had prepared a draft for an ACC report to ECOSOC which would transmit the recommendations of the PAG. He went on to state:

*This report, largely adopts the PAG's recommendations and is, I understand, agreed to by all of the concerned organizations in the United Nations system with the exception of FAO.*<sup>19</sup>

On behalf of FAO, Mr E. Saouma, later to become Director General, responded to Mr Chafkin, expressing interest and appreciation for the PAG report and noting in particular:

*...The broad measure of agreement in the report with the proposals which were put forward by the ACC to ECOSOC. I share fully the concern of your members regarding the need to ensure that adequate outside advice is available to the UN system through the proposed ACC Subcommittee on Nutrition. Whether the arrangements proposed by the PAG are, in fact, the most appropriate ones is a question which we shall be taking up in the ACC next month.*<sup>20</sup>

There is no record of response from WHO or other agencies.

## **2.8 What is the nature of the nutrition problem and how has it changed over the last 30 years?**

Before starting the history of the SCN proper, it is helpful to get some idea of the nature and magnitude of nutrition problems, to show the sorts of problems that the SCN has been grappling with in its term. Of course, what has happened over the years does not reflect the effectiveness or otherwise of the SCN, but this gives a sense of the realities of the seriousness of the challenges faced.

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17 Information from the minutes of the 24th PAG session (mimeographed document (PAG/267/77)).

18 Undated cable signed by Narasimhan.

19 Letter of 11 March 1977.

20 Letter of 11 March 1977.

**Table 2.1 Estimated prevalence and number of underweight children 0–5 years old 1990–2005 by UN region <sup>21</sup>**

UN Region	Prevalence (%)				Numbers (m)			
	1990	1995	2000	2005	1990	1995	2000	2005
Africa	23.6	23.9	24.2	24.5	25.3	27.8	30.9	34.5
Asia	35.1	31.5	27.9	24.8	131.9	116.3	101.2	89.2
Latin America and Caribbean	8.7	7.3	6.1	5.0	4.8	4.0	3.4	2.8
All developing countries	30.1	27.3	24.8	22.7	162.2	148.2	135.5	126.5

Table 2.1 shows that although both the prevalence and number of underweight children have fallen since 1990 (a tremendous achievement by all involved), the problems are increasing in Africa. Data from FAO, based on national food consumption data (in terms of the amount of food available per person nationally, derived from food balance sheets and the extent of inequality in access to food) suggests that 17 per cent of people in the developing world were ‘undernourished’ in 1999–2001, down from 18 per cent in the mid 1990s. Over that period the absolute number of food insecure in the developing world increased from 780 million to 798 million. Similar data on iodine, iron and vitamin A deficiency are presented in the relevant sections of this report.

## 3 The First Era (1977–1985)

### 3.1 The SCN was set up with the triumvirate structure of agencies, AGN and bilateral donors

The SCN was accountable to the ACC, was expected to meet twice a year and:

To keep under review the overall direction, scale, coherence and impact of the UN system response to the nutritional problems of the world.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See the *Fifth Report on the World Nutrition Situation: Nutrition for Improved Development Outcomes*, March 2004. No data are available for Oceania; data for 2005 are projections. The Sixth Report will contain estimates up to 2007 and will be published in mid 2010.

<sup>22</sup> *Report of the New Institutional Arrangements*, p1. Food problems, institutional arrangements relating to nutrition: statement of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, ECOSOC E/5805, 28 April 1976.

The mandate of the SCN was to promote cooperation (or harmonisation to use a more current term) among UN agencies and partner organisations in support of national, regional and international efforts to end malnutrition. It was to do this by: refining the direction, increasing the scale and strengthening the coherence and impact of actions against malnutrition worldwide; and raising awareness of nutrition problems and mobilising commitment to solve them at global, regional and national levels.

The support of FAO was won over and an agreement was made that the initial secretariat would be established in Rome instead of New York. The mandate of the ACC/SCN was established by ECOSOC in April 1977 and the first meeting of the new SCN, under the chairmanship of Mr G. Kermode of FAO, was convened in Rome in September 1977. Sol Chafkin was the Chair of the new AGN, and an agenda of topics to be addressed, developed by a PAG committee meeting in Geneva in May 1977, became a background paper for discussion at that first SCN meeting. There was a direct continuity between the PAG and SCN, though there was also an extremely important change in organisational structures and in the precise mandate. Participation was now open to individual countries, particularly those with active nutrition interests in their bilateral agencies, alerted by Dr Cravioto, and operating in the political forum of ECOSOC. This made the big difference in creating the SCN. With this change, there has been a continuous active interest of bilaterals in the SCN, although this waxes and wanes according to the priorities of the bilaterals.

Mr E.J.R. (Dick) Heyward of UNICEF took over the Chair at the second session of the SCN in December 1977 and continued as chair for six consecutive sessions, passing the duty on to John Evans (World Bank) in 1982 and then to Moises Mensah of IFAD for the 10th and 11th sessions in 1984–1985. In recalling his time in the Chair, Mr Heyward emphasised the importance of the triumvirate nature of this new body (the agencies, the AGN, and the invited bilaterals) and the fact that they all sat down and talked with each other:

*We... avoided discussion of programmes and thus inter-agency rivalry. The agenda was policies. Fortunately there was no discussion of agency rivalry. There was a very good collegial atmosphere.*<sup>23</sup>

Heyward also believed it was important to reverse the relationship between experts and policymakers. Many others also commented on the collegiality of that period. Heads of nutrition departments in the UN agencies all supported the SCN, as well as Alan Berg from the World Bank who had a considerable influence at this time, and with Heyward and others ensured that bilaterals such as USAID, for example, were present though not as fully fledged members.

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23 Comment from E. Heyward.

### 3.2 There was a shift in power as the AGN reported to the SCN

The ACC had proposed that the AGN would be composed of 5–6 members serving as the replacement to the PAG. Drawing on documentation,<sup>24</sup> Ruxin notes that the AGN was expected to: (i) respond to requests for advice from the SCN; (ii) bring important issues to the SCN's attention; (iii) help carry out the SCN's programme of work and; (iv) maintain contacts in the scientific community outside the UN agencies.

The SCN would direct requests at individuals within the AGN as required, but the whole AGN was not expected to flesh out every request. If needed outside consultants would be enlisted to respond to specific requests outside the scope of the AGN's competence. But this shows the shift in power, which was resented by many eminent nutritionists: it was the SCN that would set up AGN meetings, appoint members and service their meetings (Ruxin 1996: 299–300).

### 3.3 Beginning the partnership with bilaterals

Dr Leslie Burgess, the first Technical Secretary of the SCN, recalls that things were not always quite as smooth as Heyward's words might imply but that after an initial period of jostling, did settle into the pattern described. An early dispute concerned the bilaterals and whether or not they should be invited to attend SCN meetings, perhaps as observers but not to participate: the ECOSOC resolution encouraged bilateral involvement but it was not binding. It was a matter of dispute among the agencies but it was soon resolved and the bilaterals were invited to attend with the triumvirate sitting at the table (UN agencies, AGN, and bilaterals). Over the years the entry of the bilaterals (which continued to be disputed by FAO in particular) has grown to what today must be seen as a near-full partnership. Dr Burgess recalls also that the Chair was a critical part of the early successes and indeed survival of the fledgling SCN, and he allowed people to give full voice to their thoughts and opinions:

*Dick Heyward knew everyone, was greatly respected for building UNICEF, but always played it low key and was not perceived as a power threat. At a lower level, I was quite well known and correctly diagnosed as having no desire to head anyone's nutrition division or snatch the kudos for some piece of work, again not a threat.*<sup>25</sup>

The termination of the PAG and formation of the SCN symbolised a lowering of the status of the nutrition expert, but not of the practice of nutrition and with Heyward as Chair, nutrition was actually boosted (Ruxin 1996: 339).

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24 *Report of the New Institutional Arrangements in the UN System for Nutrition*, second session of the Ad Hoc Committee on Food and Nutrition Policies, Rome, March 1978, ESN FNP/78/7, p3, see Ruxin (1996: 299).

25 Comments from Dr Burgess.



### 3.4 What the SCN achieved in its first seven years

The view of the technical agencies remained that the SCN should not get too high a profile and become, or be seen as, for example, an implementing agency in its own right. The first two years were spent mainly on administrative matters with an effort to reach consensus on national nutrition actions in the field. After 1978 and the 4th Session, meetings were held annually, except for 1990 when two Sessions (16th and 17th) were held prior to the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN). The SCN achieved important things in those early years. At the 9th session (Copenhagen, March 1983), Sol Chafkin was invited to review the first seven years of the SCN. His report was presented at the 10th session in Rome in March 1984. In his review,<sup>26</sup> Chafkin presented a list of things that probably would not have happened without the SCN. The list included:

- the work of the SCN Consultative Group on Maternal and Young Child Nutrition, subsequently continued by UNICEF and WHO (and reappeared as the Working Group on Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding);
- working with UNICEF, a review of experience in supplementary feeding programmes for young children in developing countries, 'a study that opened up the significance of physical activity as a key element in the development of at-risk children' (and also contributed to a renewed interest on the part of the WFP to develop new approaches to programme evaluation);
- encouraging and assisting FAO to develop 'the first systematic and testable methodology bearing on the possible nutritional consequences of agricultural and rural development projects';
- initiating state-of-the-art papers on nutrition interventions and additional research on the question of what projects and programmes make a difference – an activity that continued and was welcomed by many groups;
- taking a first step in eliciting interest from regional development banks in integrating nutritional considerations in agricultural and rural development projects;
- with UNU, convening a workshop to prepare methodologies providing an opportunity to support the WFP in undertaking evaluations of food aid projects; and
- also, later achievements, such as approaches for control of iodine and vitamin A deficiency, which found their roots in those early meetings.

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26 Chafkin, S., 'The ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition. After Seven Years: Expectations and Accomplishments', Document 84/9, 10th Session of the ACC Sub Committee on Nutrition, Rome, 5–9 March 1984.



### 3.5 *Nutrition News* and the beginnings of *SCN News*

In those early years Leslie Burgess, prompted by Alan Berg, set in motion the beginning of what has become a very popular activity of the SCN. He initiated a nutrition news service operating within the SCN but available outside the circle to those who asked to be on the mailing list. It was a compilation of clippings that people sent to the SCN or the Secretariat found, and these were assembled on sheets, photocopied and mailed out as the periodic newsletter. It was not elaborate but was useful and informative.

In later eras, this activity was continued but in a very different format. It became the *SCN News*, each with a theme. No 1 was issued in March 1988 and No. 37 in early 2009. By 1995, *SCN News* had a circulation of about 5,000 copies per issue, growing to 7,500 copies in 2006, with three quarters being sent to countries outside Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The *SCN News* carried clipping-like short items but also feature stories and news about SCN activities. There have also been valuable 'state of the art' articles that many developing country researchers have found very useful as they often do not have the access to the journals of their more privileged colleagues.<sup>27</sup> Over time, *SCN News* became a substantial publication and an excellent means of keeping up to date with events and thinking in international nutrition. *SCN News* and the Nutrition Policy Papers, currently published as supplements to the UNU Food and Nutrition Bulletin have also become vehicles by which the SCN reaches a large audience of nutrition professionals, especially those in developing countries.

### 3.6 The SCN loses a sense of urgency

The controversial background to the formation of the SCN may have contributed to the cautious way in which the SCN chose to operate in the early years. After recalling the sense of urgency that existed in 1977 when the SCN was established, Chafkin noted that:

Over the years of the SCN, the urgency of the World Food Conference recommendations seemed to have lessened. At the same time the agendas [of the SCN] evolved to give attention to more specific topics and the SCN shifted to a system of working groups or committees organized around these subjects. The SCN now [1984] has groups on nutrition in agriculture and rural development, food aid, applied nutrition research, and training.

(Chafkin 1984: 5)

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27 The generous funding provided to *SCN News* from bilateral partners, especially the Government of Netherlands most recently, has run low and partial funding from USAID was agreed for the 2007–2009 biennium. As a result, the SCN has not been able to maintain a worldwide distribution of hard copies. In September 2007, the SCN introduced the Email Update, sent to approximately 2,500 SCN contact emails.

Chafkin continued to note that: 'The SCN has been described as the most active of the ACC's subcommittees' and went on that 'it has settled comfortably into a pattern of work that offends no one' and then raised a series of questions that were to open new ways of SCN operations. He suggested:

That is usually the time to raise questions about institutions, even small ones like the SCN. Is its activity aimed at the right targets? Is it doing too many of some things and not enough of others? Is its work making any difference to anyone? Is it time to concentrate limited SCN energies and budgets on a limited number of issues? Which ones?

(Chafkin 1984: 21)

What Chafkin saw missing from the SCN's roster of accomplishments was summarised as follows:

The failures of the SCN generally represent failure to accomplish what only the SCN was in a position to accomplish... After seven years of trying it has not produced any inventory of current and projected activities and projects carried out by its members and bilaterals. [It] has also failed to develop any information on the annual flow of external resources for any one year aimed at nutrition problems in countries... A third and related failure was the early abandonment of a periodic review *by the SCN* of the global (or even selected regions or countries) nutrition situation.

(Chafkin 1984: 17)

### **3.7 Muscat's recommendations about the way forward for international nutrition**

As evidence of the root problems, Chafkin commented on the negative reactions to the ideas offered by an earlier paper commissioned by the SCN and written by Robert Muscat. Muscat had been invited at the SCN's 8th session in Bangkok (February 1982), to prepare a paper on *Responding to the Changing Nutritional Conditions of the 1980's: Roles for the International Agencies* for the 9th Session in Copenhagen (March 1983). This paper included an analysis of a series of country papers with many interviews. This was a new style for SCN-commissioned activities, with the intent to present an incomplete draft for review and discussion, thereby engaging the SCN itself in a new type of inter-agency discussion, as indicated by the report:

To facilitate SCN discussion, the study contains a summary of recommendations, grouped by topic. Given the number of recommendations, the tentative character of some, the need for more thought and staff work, and the fact that action on them would require a mix of SCN, single agency and joint agency decisions, it is suggested that the SCN appoint a working group to develop specific actions and initiate specific follow-on for those items the SCN decides are worth pursuing.<sup>28</sup>

The report itself was hard-hitting, generally pessimistic about the status quo arrangements, and proposed some general approaches to be considered by

the SCN. Many were related to achieving redistribution of effective demand for food and other necessities but would imply diversion of resources from some of the existing projects of agencies and bilaterals alike to which they had strong attachment. However, the wording was toned down on these recommendations, couched in terms such as 'it would be wise for ... to review the cost-effectiveness of ...'

### **3.8 And the proposals were for the SCN to engage in inter-agency discussions**

The paper was very explicitly a call to arms for the SCN, to engage in the inter-agency, multidisciplinary discussions it had been established to foster but had managed to avoid. Perhaps the Muscat paper was too much, too soon. In retrospect, it had considerable foresight but the SCN members and associates were not prepared for the level of discussion which would involve rethinking of agency priorities, something that those present at the table did not control in their own agencies and perhaps only marginally influenced. It was out of their domain and therefore, perhaps perceived to be out of the domain of the SCN.

When the paper was presented at the annual session in Copenhagen, it did not attract the full discussion that had been anticipated and it was far from the sort of 'collegial discussion' that had characterised the early meetings of the SCN. In Chafkin's terms:

Some of [the report's] ideas seem wholly consistent with the SCN's original mandate to make UN system activities coherent and to take dynamic initiatives. But the ninth session relegated the paper to the status of personal views of a consultant rather than an SCN product.<sup>29</sup> The record shows that the chief flaw in the paper was tinkering with the existing systems of existing agencies. Still there may be recognition at later meetings that outside views about changing the status quo may be worth considering or even adopting.

(Chafkin 1984: 19–20)

Writing only a year after the Muscat paper had been presented, Chafkin could not have known how great has been the indirect influence of the Muscat paper, or the thinking it represented, on the SCN. Many of the issues raised were featured in subsequent SCN agendas. Even though it may have been ignored and even suppressed at the time, the Muscat paper was not forgotten and still makes interesting reading.

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28 UN/ACC Doc No. SCN 83/5 *Responding to the Changing Nutritional Conditions of the 1980's; Roles for the International Agencies*. A report to the SCN, sponsored by the AGN. Prepared and coordinated by Robert J. Muscat. Draft document. December, 1982. For 9th session of the UN ACC-SCN, Copenhagen, 1983.

29 Something similar was to happen in 1999 when the Millennium Commission report was presented.

### 3.9 The ‘estimates of malnutrition’ furore

At about this time, there had been an abortive attempt to harmonise or at least explain the widely divergent estimates of the magnitude of the nutritional problem emanating from FAO (FAO 1978) and the World Bank (Reutlinger and Selowsky 1976). The differences boiled down to the use of different technical assumptions in terms of cut-off points, and with FAO using food available for consumption data and the World Bank using food expenditure data. FAO estimated in the Fourth World Food Survey that 455 million people were undernourished. This estimate was made on the basis of using *per caput* dietary energy supply which refers to the food available for human consumption as generated from food balance sheets, compiled on the basis of data on the production and trade of food commodities. This ‘availability for consumption’ figure is compared to a minimum energy requirement by sex and age with specification of a reference body weight.

The World Bank method was also an indirect means of estimating a personal distribution of food consumption in an imperfect world where such data did not (and still do not) exist. Deficits in calorie consumption were computed by income groups and by using income distribution data for different estimates and applying plausible estimates of the calorie-income relation. This led to an estimate that 56 per cent (or 840 million people) had calorie deficient diets of more than 250 kcal per day. Using different methods and assumptions, FAO and the World Bank came to diverging estimates, both in the absence of essential data.

At the initiative of the SCN (Beaton 1981),<sup>30</sup> Professor George Beaton worked with Dr Shlomo Reutlinger (the source of World Bank numbers) and FAO Statistics Division to try to understand how the estimates were so divergent when starting with essentially the same indirect data. The comparative analyses and critique were completed and the report was filed with the two agencies but was promptly embargoed by FAO and remained in their files for many years after. The problem of divergent estimates that had caused much consternation at the SCN was seemingly resolved when the World Bank stopped emphasising numbers in its press releases. Thus ‘harmony’ was achieved but not in the way one would have wanted it to happen.

### 3.10 Transition to the ‘second era’ of the SCN

It is difficult to place an exact date in the transition between the first and second eras of the SCN but it appears to have started when John Evans served as chair (1982–1983), a period that he himself characterised as:

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30 Beaton was recruited by Zak Sabry, then director of the Nutrition Division, FAO on the understanding that he would work with and report to both institutions and by inference that the report would ultimately go to the SCN.

*Associated with an attempt to try and determine which nutrition interventions really did make a difference... and to get beyond the family of nutrition enthusiasts to others in development who might be able to recognize the very significant human potential of nutrition investments.*<sup>31</sup>

In the summer of 1982, a small group of AGN members, led by Dr Abraham Horwitz as chair of the AGN and supported by Davidson Gwatkin, as borrowed staff, struggled to carry out the first mandate described by John Evans and paraphrased as 'Find out what we know how to do and can urge be done. Then tell me what we don't know how to do but with a little applied research might soon be able to do.' The specific task had arisen from SCN discussions in Bangkok (8th Session, 1982). The small group convened by Dr Horwitz collected ideas from agencies and individuals, from an inventory of needs developed by the old National Academy of Sciences Committee on International Nutrition Programs (chaired by Dr Horwitz) and from their own experiences.

### **3.11 Trying to find out what worked**

Identified topics were categorised into those needing a commissioned review to pull together an existing body of knowledge or warranted a workshop, and those for which it was judged that other information would be needed. Both lists were ranked in a priority system that considered proximity to application and importance of the problem addressed. The first of these lists marked the start of what became a highly successful series of state-of-the-art reviews, and later workshop reports and country studies, (see Appendix 2). The success of the commissioned reviews and publication programme was due to the generous support of bilateral donors, some of whom took topics on the list that were of particular interest to them, commissioned their own papers and then turned them over to the SCN.

The second list, dealing with applied research topics became lost in a succession of SCN special research committees and never emerged as the originally perceived SCN consolidated drive for nutrition research funding. The failure of the SCN applied research programme was in part the result of there being no single donor willing to support a central research funding bank or even support someone to work as a go-between in trying to develop project funding for 'approved' research projects. Even if there had been such a donor it was clear that agencies, particularly FAO or WHO (depending on which research committee one examines), found that plans did not reflect their own institutional research priorities or that an SCN fund-raising campaign might interfere with their own funding plans. So the SCN research committee plan died.

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31 Comments by John Evans in a letter to George Beaton, 4 February 1998.

### 3.12 The Grottaferrata Retreat and what it set out for the future

The real marker of the change between eras was an SCN retreat held in the town of Grottaferrata, near Rome in October 1985. Leslie Burgess commented about the origins of that retreat:

*By early 1985, things were going fairly smoothly, agencies were cooperating and paying attention to nutrition factors; the AGN was doing well and the bilaterals increasingly enthusiastic. By spreading [meetings] around the globe, more national and regional people were being involved. [The SCN] could have continued in this low key [fashion]... But there was a real risk of momentum loss. Many [of the UN agencies] and the bilaterals were eager to do more, hence the unofficial decision was made to make the SCN more proactive and also try to move from FAO.<sup>32</sup> Hence the Grottaferrata meeting. As I was retiring in August 1985, it also gave the opportunity for a totally new secretariat.<sup>33</sup>*

The retreat was convened by the new Chair of the SCN, Dr Abraham Horwitz (former director of PAHO and still a member of WHO regional staff). Its purpose was to allow SCN members (FAO, UNICEF, World Bank, WFC, WFP), two members of the AGN (Professors Habicht and Beaton) and staff of the Secretariat an opportunity to discuss 'Tasks, Objectives, Accomplishments and Future Work of the ACC/SCN'.<sup>34</sup> The SCN members took a very conscious decision to effect major change in its structure and *modus operandi*, to strengthen the activity of the Secretariat, and to attempt to do some of the things that had been identified by Muscat and Chafkin as missing from its agenda, or as emerging challenges. A very important structural change was proposed at that time:

*In a significant departure from the earlier mode of operation, a change was proposed for greater efficiency and output. Instead of active involvement in all issues as in the past, participating agency representatives would act more as a board of directors. Annually they would look at the programs presented by the executive secretary, and in effect, giving that officer the responsibility for making decisions and taking actions within a broad mandate.<sup>35</sup>*

Coming soon after the meeting in Nairobi (11th Session, February 1985) and the associated attempt to examine issues of country-level coordination of activities among UN agencies and bilateral donors, the retreat also noted that:

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32 Which was agreed and happened, with the SCN based in Geneva aligned to WHO, where it has remained to the current day.

33 Comments by Leslie Burgess in a letter to George Beaton, 18 March 1998.

34 The description of this meeting and its decisions is based on Report of an Informal Meeting on Tasks, Objectives, Accomplishments and Future Work of the ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition, Grottaferrata, 24–26 October, 1985, (Document SCN 86/7A presented at the 12th session in Tokyo, April 1986.

35 ACC-SCN, Report on an Informal Meeting on Tasks, Objectives, Accomplishments and Future Work of the ACC Sub Committee on Nutrition, Grottaferrata, 24–26 October 1985.



The symposium held during the 11th session – and subsequent activities, had evoked different functional reactions in different agencies. It was stressed that the SCN should not exert an operational role when undertaking similar exercises in the future

(Grottaferrata Report Meeting, *op cit.*)

The constraint against any operational role of the SCN (or its new secretariat structure) was then directed to the ten year plans for the eradication of various nutritional deficiencies approved (by the ACC). At that time, the SCN had accumulated a substantial reserve fund. It was agreed that this should be used to support the proposed increased scope and intensity of activity as well as soliciting support from bilateral and other donors. The Grottaferrata discussions certainly opened the doors to major changes in the Second Era. Such change was further enabled by the fact that with the appointment of Dr Horwitz, the SCN had a Chair 'with the *time* and interest to build the SCN and [to] try to honour the new mandate (Grottaferrata Report Meeting, *op cit.*). The AGN of the future was to have two main roles: being an expert panel – investigating in depth a subject identified by the SCN; and having a catalytic role – drawing the SCN's attention to matters of significance.

The first SCN meeting chaired by Dr Horwitz was the 12th session in Tokyo in April 1986. As will be mentioned below, that meeting certainly started the process of breaking new ground and the Second Era was explicitly under way. Nearly all of the standing committees of the SCN were abolished and Ad Hoc Working Groups were to be created selectively as need arose – with the idea that they would survive only as long as needed to support SCN interests (of course, most took on a life of their own and the numbers have kept increasing).

## 4 The Second Era (1985–1999)

One characteristic of the Second Era, separate from the restructured and redefined role of the Secretariat, was a mood of urgency and impatience – the desire to actually do something that would make a difference. Many things done in the First Era were making a difference but the feedback to the SCN was not persuasive enough to lift the feeling of inadequate response to the original WFC resolution. This impatience was illustrated by John Evans' speech to the SCN Annual Meeting in Copenhagen (1983) when he used the metaphor of the newly opened population clock and suggested that the clock also counted child deaths. In the second half of the 1980s, the Horwitz-Mason team set about its new task, WHO hosted the Secretariat in Geneva, and at times fever-pitched activity commenced.

### 4.1 Starting the World Nutrition Situation reports

The Second Era was marked also by the very real accomplishment of beginning at long last the process of collecting, presenting and later analysing

data on the world nutrition situation. This was attributable to the major efforts of John Mason, as the new Technical Secretary from mid 1986, the several high class technical staff and consultants working for the SCN, and the AGN under the active chairmanship of Professor Jean-Pierre Habicht. Individual agencies were initially opposed to such an SCN report but it was agreed to go ahead on the basis of synthesising agencies' existing data. Once this was done, it was possible to bring these together, harmonise the estimates and allow examination of multiple dimensions at once. One significant reaction was the finding that there was a high prevalence of child undernutrition in Asia compared to Africa. World Nutrition Reports were the outstanding achievement of the Second Era. A third feature of the Era would be the parade of 'Summit' meetings on nutrition and related topics (World Summit for Children 1990; Ending Hidden Hunger 1991; International Conference on Nutrition 1992; World Summit for Social Development 1995; World Food Summit 1996; and others). But in the final analysis, the very success of these activities set in motion a reaction which led to the ending of this Era of the SCN. The era ended with a further re-organisation of the SCN and the disbanding of the AGN.

## 4.2 Changes in the AGN and the Chairing of the SCN

With the major change in the programme of work of the SCN, the AGN changed with John Kevany as Chair, who took over from Jean-Pierre Habicht in 1987. He vividly recalled his personal experience:

*I was invited to take over the chairmanship of the SCN's AGN in the mid-80's. John Mason... explained to me the functions of the AGN and the duties of the chairman, [and the need to] contain [any] sharp, rapid and valuable brush of personalities. The great benefit of this exhaustive process [argument between experts] was that nothing, but nothing, would get by the AGN without the most rigorous debate and analysis.<sup>36</sup>*

John Kevany characterised Dr Horwitz as a person who seemed constantly rejuvenated by the process of bringing leadership and imagination to what otherwise might have been inter-agency rivalry and bureaucratic chaos. Among the strongest recollections of his period as SCN chair, John Evans, provides high praise for Dr Horwitz.

John Kevany continues:

*Another feature of the AGN meetings was the address by Dr Horwitz at the opening session... but [there was an] enormously long agenda from which few items were ever dropped... As Dr Horwitz addressed us... he was adding new agenda items... and [he said afterwards] 'where would we be if we did not have new ideas and issues to consider? It does not matter that the agenda was long – we must make sure that it contains all possible items that need to be addressed.'<sup>37</sup>*

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36 Comments by John Kevany in a letter to George Beaton, 10 February 1998.

37 Comments by John Kevany, as above.



John Mason offered a closely related description of the early era with Dr Horwitz at the helm of not been ever able to drop any item or set priorities:

*I sent [to him] a long, carefully reasoned note, pointing out that we could not cope with 40 items, among which were 6 meetings, 5 books, and [others]. We had to set some priorities. 'No'; a short and clear reply. He couldn't see any that were not important. He wanted them all – back to 40.<sup>38</sup>*

The reorganised functional structure established a 'secretariat' that consisted of Dr Horwitz, John Mason, Secretariat staff, the AGN and consultants recruited to perform major parts of specific projects. A new sort of triumvirate was emerging in the SCN forum – the SCN (the actual agencies functioning as a Board of Directors in the terminology of the Grottaferrata deliberations), the bilaterals and the Secretariat. This was a very productive arrangement in terms of output of publications in particular, but it was also one that resulted in serious divisions, as complaints grew over the exceeding of terms of reference and purpose. The SCN would never return to the collegial camaraderie of the First Era. Conversely, it would continue and expand activities started in that Era and would add new activities in keeping with the original mandate assigned by ECOSOC.

One observer of this period remarked that:

*A major role of the SCN in so far as affecting policies in [at least some] member organizations was that it was useful as a kind of a support group for those who were sent to attend. These people were usually fighting an uphill battle within their respective organizations, without a great deal of support from the vast majority of their institutional colleagues. I don't think that the higher-ups in the organizations paid attention to the... SCN except when [SCN] pronouncements were supportive to an activity or policy they were trying to implement.*

(Anonymous 1998)

This view of the SCN is reflected also in remarks from other observers and it must be tempered by realisation that while the SCN did not drive policy, it did contribute to the facilitation of policy development or change. Several examples can be cited – one is the symposium at the 12th Session in Tokyo – the first SCN meeting chaired by Dr Horwitz in April 1986.

#### **4.3 The SCN, structural adjustment and the International Financing Institutions**

The SCN had taken heed of the importance of building closer linkages with the institutions involved in providing development loans. Moises Mensah of IFAD (in 1984) served as chair immediately after John Evans of the World Bank, so

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38 Comments by John Mason in a letter to George Beaton, 9 March 1998.

there was growing awareness of and interest in the economic aspects of nutrition. When Muscat presented his paper at Copenhagen in 1983, there was also the realisation that nutritional considerations were going to be lost in the drive for economic stabilisation, structural adjustment and debt repayment and the delayed return to economic growth. Muscat had given emphasis to the importance of this and suggested, for example, that the SCN should try to reach the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In the World Bank, the subject of possible approaches to amelioration of these problems had been debated for a number of years but there was very strong opposition at the top to any major change in policy. At the WFP there were active discussions about how food aid might be used to cushion the blow among lower income groups. How did the SCN contribute in this situation?

#### 4.4 The IMF

In Tokyo, the symposium was on nutrition and economic adjustment. Horwitz had prepared carefully and invited a key speaker from the IMF. It was the first time the IMF had attended the SCN. At the symposium the IMF was exposed, more than it had been before, to the nutrition setbacks associated with economic adjustment policies. After being very defensive on the day of the symposium, the two IMF representatives on the second day adopted a very different stance. They joined in considering the main theme of the symposium: how could nutritional considerations be brought into adjustment policy? Professor Sir Richard Jolly, then attending in his capacity as deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, spoke of the need for 'Adjustment with a Human Face'. He has written (Jolly 1991) an account of a very direct connection between this SCN meeting (and discussion in its corridors), and the IMF's declaration soon after recognising the importance of nutritional issues in the making of adjustment policies. Given the IMF's lack of technical competence on nutritional matters, the IMF recognised it needed to look to others in the UN family for assistance in analysing the nutritional issues and seeing how nutritional concerns could be brought into the making of adjustment policies. Although the SCN symposium was only one of many things happening in the period, he noted that within three months of the SCN meeting, M. de Larosi re presented his report to ECOSOC and included a strong statement on the need for adjustment programmes to safeguard human needs. This report stated that:

*Programmes of adjustment cannot be effective unless they command the support of governments and of public opinion. Yet this support will be progressively harder to maintain, the longer adjustment continues without some pay-off in terms of growth and while human conditions are deteriorating. Likewise it is hard to visualize how a viable external position can be achieved if large segments of the work force lack the vocational skills – or even worse the basic nutritional and health standards – to produce goods that are competitive in world markets. Human capital is after all the most important factor of production in developing and industrial countries alike.*

*But the fact that adjustment need not conflict with growth and protection of basic human needs does not mean either that the latter automatically result from the former... Authorities will have to be concerned not only with if they close the fiscal deficit, but also with how they do so... The forms of adjustment that are most conducive to growth and protection of human needs will not emerge by accident. They have to be encouraged by an appropriate set of incentives and policies... and also require political courage.*<sup>39</sup>

## 4.5 And the World Bank

Later in 1986, an important policy paper was finally released from the World Bank (Reutlinger and Pelican 1986). This paper was not in keeping with previous policy of the Bank and had been in preparation for a long time. The change in Bank policy was likely to be attributable primarily to the arrival of Mr Barber Conable as President of the Bank, but before that there had been a great deal of corridor discussion, building support for a shift in policy. It is very probable that the Tokyo symposium had a positive effect as is often the case when a story emerges from many quarters.<sup>40</sup> The contribution of the paper *Adjustment with a Human Face*<sup>41</sup> delivered a year before the SCN meeting, and presented again by Professor Sir Richard Jolly at the Tokyo symposium was also a force in the evolving policy.

## 4.6 The vitamin A story

The stories of vitamin A, iodine and iron also illustrate an important supporting role of the SCN, continuing over many years. Early in the First Era of the SCN, there had been discussions of the need to move ahead with iodisation of salt to control endemic goitre and with vitamin A supplementation to control blindness. The latest data on vitamin A prevalence show it is still a serious problem:<sup>42</sup> 140 million children under five and more than 7 million pregnant women suffer from vitamin A deficiency every year; 1.2–3 million children and significant numbers of women die unnecessarily, and another 4.4 million children and 6.2 million women suffer from xerophthalmia.

In 1985, at the 11th Session in Nairobi, at the request of the SCN, Dr E.M. de Mayer brought forth the outline of a 10-year plan to control vitamin A deficiency.

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39 Mr M. de Larosi re, Speech to ECOSOC, Geneva, 4 July 1986.

40 Contributed recollections of Shlomo Reutlinger.

41 The paper was first presented under that title at the 18th World Conference of the Society for International Development in Rome in July 1985. The paper is available as Jolly R., *Adjustment with a Human Face*, first published in 1985 it was reprinted in 'Forty Years in Development: The Search for Social Justice', *Development* 1997; 40, No.1: 98–105. Sage, London.

42 Source is the *Fifth Report on the World Nutrition Situation: Nutrition for Improved Development Outcomes*, March 2004.

The plan documented the nature, extent and importance of the problem, reported on the existence of feasible field programmes in Indonesia and India, and outlined an approach to define target situations and encourage action. WHO was to be the lead agency for implementation, with the hope that bilaterals would participate in funding field operations and the agencies would absorb much of the central overhead costs. The World Health Assembly had already adopted a resolution urging member States to give high priority to the control of vitamin A deficiency. At that 1985 meeting it was recommended that the 10-year programme should be submitted to the ACC for its consideration and possible support.

At the 13th session in Washington (March 1987), the SCN reviewed progress. While there had been continued progress in research, there had been little progress in terms of operational control programmes: more action was needed. One of the early SCN state-of-the-art reviews was a review of operational experience in vitamin A supplementation by Keith West Jr and Al Sommer (West and Sommer 1987). It was known 'what we can do now and where' but it was not yet being taken up on a major scale. Unfortunately at that meeting, WHO reported that it could not support a central (Geneva-based) activity and was forced to delegate operational responsibilities for vitamin A to regional offices. This was certainly a low point for vitamin A in the UN system. Of course, the International Vitamin A Consultative Group (IVACG) continued to operate but was concerned more with research and development of field methodologies for the assessment of vitamin A status than with operational programmes.

A working group on vitamin A was established to meet with the SCN to exchange information. Some bilaterals were moving substantial resources into vitamin A control programmes and when reports appeared on positive effects of vitamin A on child mortality real interest was awakened, but was constrained by inconsistency in the field trials. The AGN urged, the SCN recommended, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) supported, a cross project analysis of the trials that had been completed. Barbara Underwood was seconded to WHO which was again able to take on the role of the technical resource for world activities. In words attributed to Al Sommer:

The importance of vitamin A deficiency appears to have risen to the top of the international health agenda. While many things contributed to this process, it is likely that this important chain of events began in 1992 with the consensus reached in the Bellagio Brief (Sommer 1992) (a meeting of a small number of representative experts from around the world) and the preparation of a meta analysis<sup>43</sup> [funded by Canada on the recommendation of the SCN and published by the SCN].

(Beaton *et al.* 1993)

The SCN had not become operationally involved in the vitamin A programme but its actions had supported work by others, provided a forum for bilateral and

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43 *Sight and Life Newsletter* No.1 1998. Basel Switzerland: p10.

agency representatives to exchange information, and through the meta analysis resolved a growing conflict, leading to a harmonisation of understanding. That *had* made a big difference.

Operationally, periodic vitamin A dosing could be linked to the Expanded Immunization Program, but many sceptics of periodic vitamin A dosing doubted its sustainability. They issued pleas for investment in food based approaches (dietary modification, fortification, etc.) as well as seeking the immediately obtainable benefits of direct supplementation. There was heated debate, with collective thinking and harmonisation of approaches needed, with divisions even at a special meeting in Montreal to follow up the SCN meta-analysis with a review of programme approaches. The SCN can take pride in the role it played in facilitating and accelerating approaches to the control of vitamin A deficiency and the implications for child mortality.

## 4.7 The iodine story

The iodine story has many parallels to vitamin A but also with extremely important differences. The data on iodine deficiency suggest that about 43 per cent of the general population in Africa and 35 per cent in Asia suffer from iodine deficiency. The prevalence among school children is 42 per cent and 38 per cent respectively (1993–2003).<sup>44</sup> However, much has been achieved in improving the coverage of households with iodised salt, with 67 per cent of households in Africa, and 53 per cent in South Asia consuming iodised salt during the period 1997–2002. The concept of a broader range of iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) than goitre was put forward in a paper by Basil Hetzel, Executive Director of the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (ICCIDD), set up in Delhi in March 1985.<sup>45</sup> Basil Hetzel was then invited to prepare a review of the problem of prevention and control of IDD (Hetzel 1988). A draft of this paper, which included a proposal to form an international consultative group to examine the scientific aspects of IDD, its public health implications and control, was discussed at the SCN meeting in Nairobi in 1985, and endorsed. It was agreed that there was sufficient evidence of effective technologies to justify a global programme. The SCN decided that, although unable to make budgetary provision, it would, first, be strongly in favour of a consultative group on IDD, second, be prepared to fund a small working meeting to formulate a strategy for possible endorsement by the ACC and third, if the proposal was endorsed, the SCN, with WHO as the lead agency, would fund the detailed preparation of the strategy.

A proposal for a 10-year programme to promote and control IDD was presented by Basil Hetzel to the 13th Session in Washington DC in 1987. A tripartite

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44 Source is the *Fifth Report on the World Nutrition Situation: Nutrition for Improved Development Outcomes*, March 2004.

45 This paper was published in *The Lancet* and also presented in a symposium of the 4th Asian Congress of Nutrition in Bangkok in November 1983.

working group was set up to help launch the programme: representatives of the interested agencies (one of which acted as Chair), bilaterals, and ICCIDD, which provided the secretariat. The working group became a valuable forum for exchange of information. This model was followed by other groups established later (vitamin A, iron, breast feeding) with chair from a member agency and secretariat from an expert group.

In the words of Basil Hetzel, the SCN participation was extremely important:

*The success of the IDD global program was considerably facilitated by the SCN structure. This goes back to the 1987 meeting when it was agreed that ICCIDD should come under the umbrella of the SCN, as neither WHO nor UNICEF were prepared to do this. The SCN provided the framework for the all important communication of the IDD message to the multilateral and bilateral agencies.*<sup>46</sup>

What was different about the iodine story was that there was a very active scientist and enthusiast with a strong dedication towards promoting research as needed to enable action. There was a very strong base of scientific knowledge and technical experience on hand. The time was ripe for action, and very important to the ultimate success; ICCIDD was set up as an international NGO with initial funding from the Australian government that could speak to governments and agencies and receive and expend funds for approved field activities. The ICCIDD model was helpful in bridging the gap between research and public policy in the case of other nutritional problems. The control of IDD is a very good example of a success story of international collaboration in addressing nutritional problems and again crucially facilitated by the SCN. While there have been some successes with resolving vitamin A and iron deficiencies, the reduction of IDD has been a major success.

## 4.8 The iron story

However, there was a different story for iron. Consensus was never really reached in programmes for iron deficiency anaemia and did not reach the stage of the 10-year plans that launched the iodine and vitamin A programmes. Iron deficiency is one of the most prevalent nutritional disorders, reported by WHO to affect 4–5 billion people.<sup>47</sup> It has a high cost in terms of impaired cognitive development.

For many years, WHO, under Dr de Mayer, had a Nutritional Anaemias group which performed the extremely important task of obtaining agreement on criteria, a prerequisite to defining and describing the problem, and treatment protocols. That activity was taken over by the International Nutritional Anemia Consultative Group (INACG) which issued many important reports relating to

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46 Comments in a letter to George Beaton, March 1998.

47 Source is the *Fifth Report on the World Nutrition Situation: Nutrition for Improved Development Outcomes*, March 2004.



the promotion and interpretation of research relevant to control of iron deficiency anaemia. Unlike the IVACG, however, it lacked a clear role in the promotion of operational programmes.

The SCN recognised the importance of iron and took many steps to help promote the development and promotion of effective control programmes. As evidence of a possible causal association between iron deficiency anaemia and mental development of children began to emerge, the SCN co-sponsored a conference intended to examine the evidence available and offer an assessment and recommendation.<sup>48</sup> At its 15th Session in 1989, the SCN identified an urgent need to provide guidance on measures for improving effectiveness of iron supplementation. Scaled-up programmes had had limited impact. The AGN defined key questions that had to be answered, on the basis of actual field experience. At its 16th Session, in Paris in February 1990, the SCN concluded that answers to these key questions were not available in the literature. It was agreed that a workshop should be convened, to draw on experience from a sample of large scale supplementation programmes and fortification and diet modification.

The workshop was held in June 1990 and the published report appeared in February 1991.<sup>49</sup> While the workshop did not succeed in developing specific guidelines, it presented a strong analysis of the problems. What the workshop demonstrated was that a very substantial part of the problem was attributable to failures in the infrastructure supplying and distributing the iron pills. The greatest need was in improved programme management and some guidance was offered by the workshop.

The SCN established a working group to provide a forum for ongoing exchange of information. Meetings of this group were usually very well attended and the agendas reflect the continuing high level of interest in this area.

#### **4.9 The Micronutrient Initiative is set up as a funding mechanism**

On micronutrients, there was another important initiative proposed by Dr Horwitz in 1989. With growing interest in micronutrients, but continuing problems in initiating programmes, a central body specifically concerned with micronutrients was needed. Dr Horwitz proposed that the SCN itself take on that role. While there was considerable support for a central focal point for micronutrients, there was near unanimous opposition among agencies and potential bilateral donors, to the idea that the SCN itself should become operationally involved in combating micronutrient malnutrition. Only the World Bank voiced strong support for the proposal to set up a second secretariat to do micronutrient work. The Micronutrient Initiative (MI), which is now

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48 The proceedings of the conference, held in Geneva in 1988, were published as a supplement to the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in 1989 (see Appendix 2).

49 *Controlling Iron Deficiency: A Report Based on an ACC/SCN Workshop*, ACC/SCN State-of-the-Art Series Nutrition Policy Discussion Paper 9, February 1991.

associated with the SCN as an international NGO, was the outcome of that debate, mostly funding iodine and vitamin A interventions. It was set up in 1992 in Ottawa with support from CIDA, IDRC and others. The establishment of a central body promoting operations and operational research relating to micronutrient malnutrition could be seen as another beneficial offshoot of the SCN. However, by creating the MI and others, the international nutrition system was further fractionated.

#### **4.10 But also PAMM, OMNI and ILSI**

At that time, it was not anticipated that the internationally supported Programme Against Micronutrient Malnutrition (PAMM) would become an important focal point for micronutrient fortification activities or that USAID would assign very large sums of money to a new organisational structure, Opportunities for Micronutrient Intervention (OMNI) as well as continuing ear-marked funding of vitamin A programmes. It is interesting that even the industry-sponsored International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) has its own Micronutrient Initiative. The SCN also set up a micronutrient consultative group but this was set aside in favour of the working groups on vitamin A, iodine and iron that met each year adjacent to the SCN meetings. Once interest in micronutrients caught on, there was an enormous rush of activity in the search for technological solutions to nutritional problems, but with it worries that nutritional action might be driven by commercial interests and diverted from the continuing problem of general undernutrition in developing countries. Finding a proper mechanism in the SCN activities to include the private sector, as well as its funded research foundations has been a continuing and unresolved issue.

#### **4.11 Publication of the first Report on the World Nutrition Situation**

Most of those interviewed for this SCN History regard the Reports of the World Nutrition Situation as the major contribution of the SCN. As coordinator and author, the SCN provided an authoritative series that is quoted as the major source of statistics about the world nutrition situation. Most UN agencies now publish a 'State of the World's ...' (insert the mandate area of that agency) and in the absence of a UN agency for nutrition, SCN has now fulfilled this 'global public goods' role of an agency providing impartial global information.

The First Report appeared in November 1987 with an update in January/February 1989. The Second appeared in October 1992 (just prior to the ICN) with a second volume in March 1993 and updates in 1994 and 1996. The Third Report was published in December 1997. Then two further reports were produced in the SCN's Third Era: the Fourth World Nutrition Situation (subtitled 'Nutrition Through the Life Cycle') in January 2000, and the Fifth Report, subtitled Nutrition for Improved Development Outcomes, in March 2004. The Sixth Report will be published in the latter part of 2010.

The Reports have helped to put the various dimensions of 'the nutrition



problem' into perspective – an extremely important accomplishment since there are now many bodies championing particular dimensions of the problem and, at government level, competing for attention, time and resources. The availability of the periodic updates on the Reports is a force for harmonisation, not only among the UN agencies but also at country level.

The reports were the product of the labour of many individuals from different agencies, and when it was in existence, the AGN. However, preparing the first report had put a very heavy dent in the SCN reserves. To continue this work, external money was needed. Ted Greiner recalls that:

*During one of my first sessions, probably 1987, Professor Horwitz and John Mason said they needed money and wondered whether the bilaterals might be able to help. I told them that the first world nutrition report seemed so well done with trends for several variables visible simultaneously (and not just 'pure' nutrition ones), it was the kind of report that agency planners must find useful. I asked them to send me a proposal and I would try it out with SIDA.<sup>50</sup>*

SIDA did support the initial request and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) was persuaded to also help continue the activity. Since then, the cost of the series of World Nutrition Reports has been supported almost totally by funding from bilaterals. It was clear that the reports were an activity of the SCN Secretariat, using data from the UN agencies. They had been asked to do it and, although there was sometimes grumbling about credits and interpretations, the Secretariat performed the job, as mandated back in 1977, and international reception has been very appreciative.

It is important to underline the intellectual role of John Mason and his staff in producing these reports.<sup>51</sup> In the mid 1970s, direct evidence of nutritional status was only available for a handful of countries, hardly any with data for more than one or two years and this with no information on global or regional nutrition trends. The staff of the Secretariat initially combined first hand data with an explicit econometric model to make regional estimates of nutrition trends during the 1980s for the world. These were bold and heroic but better than anything then available. They served as a major incentive for the DHS and the MICS (Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys of UNICEF) to produce actual data on nutrition status for an increasing number of countries. At this time (1989 to 1994) the SCN Secretariat was at its peak in terms of funding, with support from UNICEF, the World Bank, SIDA and others. At the time of writing, in early 2010, direct data on nutritional status is available for nearly 100 countries of which about 70 have data on trends.

Urban Jonsson describes the impact the Reports had on policymaking among governments in South Asia:

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50 Comments by Ted Greiner in a letter to George Beaton, 12 February 1998.

51 Including Marito Garcia, Stuart Gillespie and Mahshid Lotfi.

*The publication and wide distribution of Global Nutrition Reports has been a very important contribution of the SCN. As increasingly more data have become available, these reports have been used in national-level advocacy for greater attention to nutrition. These reports, for example, helped in convincing many governments in South Asia that the nutrition problem in this region is much worse than the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, a fact not appreciated in south Asia. Compiled data from different DHS Reports were never enough. It was not until an authoritative report from the UN was published, people in governments started to accept the facts.<sup>52</sup>*

#### 4.12 The Refugee Nutrition Information System (RNIS)

Another series of technical publications, the reports of the RNIS, was started in the Second Era. It had an interesting beginning which also illustrates the important indirect influences of the SCN. At an SCN sponsored conference held in 1988 organised by WHO and UNHCR, attention was drawn to the fact that:

Although the total amount of emergency resources had been generous, this had proved painfully inadequate to meet escalating needs, and indeed had at times failed to reach the intended beneficiaries due to severe constraints in recipient countries. The meeting noted that consequently the rations provided very often result in a seriously insufficient and imbalanced diet.<sup>53</sup>

A statement was sent to the ACC requesting their help, and then passed to ECOSOC with an appeal to national governments for help. There is indication that it had some effect.<sup>54</sup> Also at this meeting, it was approved that energy content of the food rations should be 1900 kcal/person/day. Drs Seaman and Rivers wrote a background paper on 'Nutritional Aspects of Emergency Relief' and had to fight to have the new ration level accepted. However, it was a major achievement.

Through reports at SCN meetings, the WFP and UNHCR kept the group informed of the situation of refugees and the very limited progress achieved. Recognising that more action was badly needed, a symposium was arranged on Nutritional Issues in Food Aid at the 19th Session at WFP headquarters in Rome in 1992. One of three themes in that symposium was protecting the nutrition of Refugees and Displaced Persons with food aid. The SCN issued a statement to the ACC, portraying the terrible nutritional situations that were often found in the camps and pointing to the collective responsibility of all

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52 Urban Jonsson (UNICEF, South Asia), personal communication, 1998.

53 Conference on Nutrition in Times of Disaster, WHO/UNHCR under the auspices of the ACC/SCN and the International Nutrition Planners Forum, 27–30 September, 1988, Geneva.

54 Taken from a statement to the Organizational Committee published in the report of the symposium on Nutritional Issues in Food Aid ACC/SCN Symposium Report Nutrition Policy Discussion Paper 12, 1993.

segments of the UN system, without pointing fingers or assigning specific responsibilities.

#### 4.13 And the Working Group that was also formed

The Working Group on Nutrition of Refugees and Internally Displaced People arose from that meeting. It was a very active group and became an important contact point with the UN system for a growing network of NGOs and others involved with refugees and displaced persons. Shortly after the Rome symposium the working group, met and considered the proposal by the SCN Secretariat, for the regular reporting of the nutrition situation of refugees. Despite the misgivings of some agencies, it was decided to go ahead initially on a trial basis, and thus the RNIS was launched in February 1993;<sup>55</sup> it has been published every three months and has had a very favourable reception.

Rita Bhatia picks up the story:

*The SCN has brought Refugees and their Nutrition issues onto the international agenda... it has generated awareness among many players (including) the birth of the Refugee Nutrition Information System (RNIS) publication and the regular updates giving useful information on the situation. However, I am not sure how much impact it has on the quality of life of a refugee.*<sup>56</sup>

The reports provide a brief summary on the background on a given humanitarian situation, and including who is involved, with a focus on public nutrition and mortality rates. The reports interpret anthropometric data and judge the various risks and threats to nutrition in the long and short term. In 2004, the reports (having reached No 43 in November 2003) changed their name to 'Nutrition Information in Crisis Situations (NICS) in order to reflect that the reports were relevant to all populations affected by a crisis (e.g. refugees, displaced and resident populations). The latest NICS is No 19 and was published in June 2009.

#### 4.14 And other actions relating to the nutrition of refugees

One outcome of this process was the cementing of a network among NGOs working with refugees and providing them with a contact point with the UN system. One important activity of the network has been the Sphere project intended to establish minimal standards for nutrition but also for water, shelter and other needs for refugee programmes. This is a project of the NGOs with UN agencies being invited to participate. The SCN has helped organise and support two workshops, one in Machakos and another in Dublin in 1997, again contributing towards the growing demand for action on the refugee front. In all

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55 Based on notes contributed by Peter Greaves, personal communication, 1998.

56 Rita Bhatia, personal communication, 2 March 1998.

of this, the SCN has stopped short of taking on any operational role other than publication of the RNIS/NICS series but has had an important impact in harmonising and promoting action both within the UN system and within the larger community of individuals, governments and NGOs outside the formal UN system.

#### 4.15 Re-instigation of the infant feeding group... and facing up to HIV/AIDS

In the First Era of the SCN the Consultative Group on Maternal and Infant Feeding developed infant feeding guidelines for use by the agencies. After an initial period of productive work, the group completed its tasks and gradually lapsed into inactivity. It was terminated along with other SCN committees in the 'clean-up' after Grottaferrata in 1985. Peter Greaves recalls that it was only a matter of a couple of years until, at the 13th SCN meeting in March 1987 in Washington:

*Marty Forman (of USAID)... suggested that the time was ripe for the establishment of a consultative group for infant feeding. This prompted follow-up discussions between UNICEF and WHO which led to a consultative process culminating in the 'Innocenti Declaration on the promotion, support and protection of breast feeding' in Florence in 1990, and which could be said to be the progenitor of the Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding working group.<sup>57</sup>*

Over the next ten years that group became one of the most active of the SCN working groups. At the 25th session meeting in Oslo in 1998, the group faced a challenge with monumental policy implications for all working in developing countries. The evidence that AIDS is transmitted mother-to-infant via breast milk had become irrefutable, but the impact on child mortality is due to a mix of factors: extent of breast feeding, role of mixed feeding but above all the environmental conditions in which food and water is made available to the baby. It was explicitly clear that artificial feeding in unsanitary conditions and without nutritionally adequate formulae was a major risk factor for infectious disease morbidity and mortality in developing countries. In most of those countries the advice being offered to low income HIV+ women was 'breast feed for at least six months' while in the same countries, private patients with better financial resources were being advised 'don't breast feed'. Therein lay the dilemma – income, not equality of treatment or justice, determined the advice to be given.

While UNAIDS is the focus for the secretariat in the UN that addresses AIDS, the SCN and its working group provides a discussion forum for nutrition. It is perhaps the only opportunity in the UN system to provide such a forum and, although AIDS and its implications were not contemplated when the SCN was established, this is a clear example of the drive for a role in harmonisation among the agencies and bilaterals.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Comments by Peter Greaves in a letter to George Beaton of 22 February 1998.

#### 4.16 SCN's Country and Programme case studies

Another, widely received activity in the Second Era of the SCN was the conduct of country and programme case studies (see Annex 2). These covered Brazil, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, and had distinct purposes. Some served to flesh out stories presented in the Review of the World Nutrition Situation, others were designed to address specific programme issues, such as the review of programmes for the control of iron deficiency while others were designed to address the question 'What works where?' Urban Jonsson commented:

*In the period between Seoul and Adelaide, the ACC/SCN coordinated a large number of community-level and country-level studies on successful nutrition-oriented programs and projects. Many of the reports are excellent documents. This work has resulted in a unique consensus on what factors... are most important for a successful program... This is a significant contribution to the understanding of how to improve nutrition in practice.*<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.17 The SCN was becoming very active... and did the bilaterals now have control?

The first few years of the Second Era (1985 to 1990) were a very active era of the SCN. But trouble was brewing. The greatest problem was that the arrangements set in motion in the retreat in Grottaferrata were working very well, indeed too well. The active and activist Secretariat was doing the job it had been asked to do extremely well. But that gave it a visibility much higher than some of the SCN member agencies, especially FAO and WHO wanted to see. The arrangement was also perceived to come too close to relationships said to have existed with the old PAG, which is that the PAG was out of touch with the agencies to which it formally reported. It had its own agenda of activities and was not under the control of the agencies. In February 1990 John Kevany stepped down as Chair of the AGN and Professor Rey Martorell took over the hot seat until June 1995, then stepping down for Julia Tagwireyi who held the post until the end of 1996.

With the SCN, the new 'board of directors' mode of operation set up at Grottaferrata meant that the vehicle of control by the agencies became the review of the budget and plan of work. At the peak of the most active years many of the activities attracting a great deal of attention were outside of the regular budget, leading to unhappiness among the agencies that the bilaterals, not the agencies (who paid the core budget) had effective control. At the same time, there was growing discontent among the bilaterals that they were asked to pay for activities that most agreed were worthwhile and directly in line with the official role of the SCN, but the UN agencies should be paying their own

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58 Some good news is that the annual symposium UNAIDS holds at its Programme and Coordinating Board in December 2010, will be on food and nutrition security.

59 Urban Jonsson, personal communication, 1998.

way with funds already being supplied by the governments, not asking for more money outside the core budget. Anyone familiar with financing of UN agency activities will know this is a common story: that extra-budgetary funds take on the aspect of core budgets, and that donors often 'cherry pick' their favourite projects while not questioning the level of core funds to UN agencies.<sup>60</sup>

Tensions grew but the budget situation would have resolved itself if allowed to come to an open collegial discussion. Instead it was overtaken by another major problem that badly damaged the Second Era of the SCN and undermined its activist approach.

#### 4.18 The International Conference on Nutrition

The fatal issue was the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN). It was proposed by Dr Horwitz as the SCN Chair at the 15th session of February 1989 at UNICEF HQ in New York that consideration be given to convening a 'world summit' to reawaken interest in nutrition. This was discussed vigorously without strong opposition being voiced and referred to the next session. However, when the minutes appeared and reached the hands of officials in some of the bilateral agencies there was considerable consternation. The officials read the minutes to suggest that their representatives had given unqualified support to the idea. The officials of a number of agencies made it known that they did not want to be associated with what they saw as another big costly international meeting. At the beginning of discussion and planning of the ICN, some bilateral representatives were under direction from home to try to kill the idea, and then at least to see it was country-based and would lead to something practical.

#### 4.19 And the divisions it caused

This was the first *major* split between the bilaterals and the SCN Secretariat and a mechanism was set up with a formal liaison for communication of the Secretary with the bilaterals between as well as during meetings. Ted Greiner was the first representative chosen by the bilaterals and Elly Leemhuis took over later. Until the ICN debate started, the bilaterals had not found it necessary to meet and formulate positions on major issues. They had always met during the SCN meetings (usually while the SCN met *in camera*) and filed reports on matters about the agenda or arrangements but this was very different. Now for the first time there was what appeared to be a new triumvirate – the agencies that actually composed the SCN, the Secretariat bloc (Horwitz, Mason, the AGN and consultants) and a bilateral block, all getting ready to do battle over a suggestion that the SCN sponsor an international summit.

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60 This comment is not intended to cast negative aspersions on the specific bilateral donors who supported the SCN directly. In fact, most have a reputation for funding core UN budgets very generously and consistently.



The proposal for the ICN went to the ACC. At the ACC level, responsibility was assigned to FAO and WHO with the Secretariat function to be based in Rome. The SCN was excluded which was, perhaps, unfortunate and unjust but the exclusion of UNICEF from any role in the ICN planning was an unforgivable mistake by the ACC, and by FAO and WHO, and this played havoc with the SCN. The role given to the food industry was highly controversial. As the ICN discussions continued, the SCN became an open battle ground. The polarisation of the issues and the barely concealed fever-pitch anger round the meeting table was palpable. Arne Oshaug, who joined the meetings in the early days of the ICN discussions, recalls:

*[it was] a quite hostile atmosphere among the participating member agencies. I learned immediately that there were friends and foes, and... if you are identified with one 'camp' you were immediately looked upon with extreme skepticism by the other... you very easily may find a closed door when you approach another group. In other words, UN agencies behaved like groups (almost tribal) in communities where economic differences, culture or social class divided them... it became clear that the feelings of hostility and bitterness that several of the representatives could not conceal had an impact on their judgement. It is a serious weakness in management and leadership if one cannot separate a person from an issue. When the agencies started to cut down their contributions... from the bilateral standpoint that was not a very wise move and was contrary to what many bilaterals wanted – namely more coordination and closer collaboration between the various agencies.<sup>61</sup>*

Quoting from Urban Jonsson:

*Strong credit should go to Dr Horwitz for his extraordinary capability to chair difficult meetings. He managed to lead us towards consensus in many difficult situations... perhaps the greatest pain I have experienced in the SCN was when that great person was not allowed to speak at the ICN. At that moment I was ashamed of representing the UN.<sup>62</sup>*

The ICN took place in Rome in December 1992 as the first global conference devoted solely to addressing the world's nutrition problems. It was attended by representatives from 159 countries and the EC, 15 UN organisations and 144 NGOs. A Preparatory Committee meeting held in the August before had considered a draft declaration and plan of action that was finalised and adopted in Rome. One of the major consequences of the ICN was the preparation at the country level of National Plans of Action for Nutrition, which were completed by about 70 countries within a few years of the ICN. However, the question remained as to what more might have been achieved with greater harmony among the participating agencies.

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61 Comments by Arne Oshaug in a letter to George Beaton, 12 February 1998.

62 Comments by Urban Jonsson in a letter to George Beaton, 17 March 1998.

## 4.20 Leading to repeated questioning of the SCN function

A strong sense of obstructionism arose and suddenly the SCN was confronted with a series of ACC directives presumably applicable to all ACC committees but open to interpretation by intermediate levels in the chain of command, for individual subcommittees. Between 1992 and 1996, the functioning and usefulness of the SCN was repeatedly examined.<sup>63</sup> In 1992, the ACC's Organizational Committee asked that the SCN carry out a self-evaluation; not unexpectedly this led to a favourable conclusion (bitterly contested by FAO). The Organizational Committee of the ACC, while accepting the SCN self evaluation, asked that the SCN (a) carry out another self-evaluation in two years' time, and (b) carry out a review of the methods of work. The request for another self-evaluation was ignored.

A review of methods of work was made by the Secretariat and submitted to the 21st Session in 1994. In the meantime directives concerning rules on rotation of chairs and secretaries of ACC committees began coming down the pipe; each required answers relating to the unique nature of the SCN and its AGN and bilateral extensions. In this period it was also noted that on occasions, decisions of the SCN recorded in the minutes that had been approved word by word during the meeting of the SCN, were challenged, by representatives of some SCN member organisations, at higher levels in the ACC reporting chain as being misinterpretations or misrepresentations of what the SCN had actually intended.<sup>64</sup>

## 4.21 The evaluation sponsored by the bilateral donors

In 1995, an evaluation of the SCN was sponsored by a group of interested bilaterals (Canada, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the US).<sup>65</sup> This was independent of the agencies and ACC and conducted by a panel of outside assessors. Comments received from a number of bilateral representatives state that the intended purpose of this evaluation was constructive, seeing the absolute need to end the bickering and fighting that then characterised the SCN meetings and to try to move ahead in a new mode of common purpose. They feared that if the fighting could not be brought to an end, the SCN would die, with nothing left to replace it. They saw the importance of an SCN that was functioning effectively.

This evaluation had three objectives: (i) to critically review the SCN's mandate and document performance to date; (ii) to provide guidance on how to maintain or increase the SCN's effectiveness in the future and; (iii) to assess possible other roles, structures and administrative arrangements. The evaluation team

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63 Notes from Arie Groenendijk supported by extracts from SCN reports.

64 A finding reported in Draft Report of an Evaluation of the United Nations ACC/Subcommittee on Nutrition. Ted Freeman, Suraiya Ismail and Mamdouh H. Gabr, December 1995.

65 Ted Freeman, Suraiya Ismail and Mamdouh H. Gabr, *op cit*.



saw their key question as: how does the SCN have an effect in improving the performance of the system as a whole in responding to the challenges of nutrition, and how can this role be enhanced? The results of the evaluation were reported at the 23rd Session in Accra in February 1996.

The evaluation affirmed that a demonstrable need existed for a body such as the SCN, and that its mandate had remained unchanged over time. What had changed over time had been the operational style and the role of the Secretariat, starting from Grottaferrata in October 1985. Ten years on, this had led to the divisions that the SCN was now experiencing. This operating style placed a greater emphasis on the role of the Secretariat in carrying out much of the substantive work approved at regular SCN meetings. Problems revolved around how far that mandate carried a specific role for advocacy by the Secretariat, and also noted the lack of effective action at the country level.

The evaluation proposed four models for a future SCN. The first was to continue as it then operated. The second was termed a restrictive model: an SCN that concentrated solely on forum functions and a venue for dialogue. The third model was a non-UN council and open to participation by UN and non-UN agencies alike. The fourth model would be a reformed model, functioning within the existing mandate and within the ACC. The reformed model as proposed by the evaluation would have a new emphasis on harmonisation and coordination elements of the SCN's mandate, integrating the role of the Secretariat and member agencies. Its formal membership would be limited to the UN agencies but with observers' rights for others, decision-making processes re-examined, and a unified budget (as was done in 1993) to incorporate both core and extra budgetary funds.

#### **4.22 Then FAO withdraws funding**

Advance copies of the draft report had been seen and commented upon by many of the principals. Unfortunately, at the meeting in Accra, the dominant issue became the announcement that FAO was withdrawing all of its funding from the SCN, 'because of budgetary constraints' and WHO would be forced to cut back its contribution to a very low level. When the evaluation was tabled in Accra it was treated almost casually and a possible opportunity for the group as a whole to address the issues facing the SCN was missed. But it took several years before the wounds inflicted during those lowest years of the SCN to heal, and new growth to take over.

In Washington in 1995 Dr Horwitz had stepped down as chair and Professor Sir Richard Jolly took over. At Accra, John Mason resigned. In their final years the Secretariat continued a high level of productivity in spite of the continuing difficulties, a real credit to Dr Horwitz and John Mason. Dr Sonya Rabeneck was appointed as Technical Secretary in February 1997. It is tempting therefore to close the Second Era of the SCN at the time when the Horwitz/Mason team stepped down and the Jolly/Rabeneck team took over, which is what happened during 1996. But that would be to associate the SCN too closely with this changing of the guard.

### 4.23 SCN establishes a Millennium Commission

At the 24th session in Kathmandu in March 1997, on the recommendation of the Chairman, the SCN established a special Commission charged to look ahead at the nutritional challenges and needs of the new millennium, including their implications for the UN system and for the SCN. The group was then constituted in the corridors of the IUNS meeting in Montreal in July 1997 around an AGN meeting. The Commission was chaired by Prof Philip James and included the following members: Mahbub ul Haq, Kaare Norum, M.S. Swaminathan, Suttalak Smitasiri, Julia Tagwireyi, Ricardo Uauy, Richard Jolly (Chairman, SCN) and Sonya Rabeneck (Technical Secretary, SCN). Several papers on different issues were invited as background to the Commission with an open meeting in Montreal at the IUNS Congress and three other meetings in London. The product of all this work<sup>66</sup> was presented, as a draft for consideration by the SCN, during the Symposium at the 25th session of the SCN in Oslo in March 1998.

The symposium was chaired by the former Prime Minister of Norway, Mrs Brundtland, who was also incoming Director General of WHO in the company of senior level staff from UN organisations. This ensured that the Commission report was heard very clearly by the agencies. This report had the potential for a significant impact on the operation of the SCN. Like the earlier Muscat report, it directly challenged the agencies to come to a consensus on reasonable, doable goals for nutrition and then to a method of harmonising agency policies, activities and resource allocations, particularly at regional and country levels, to achieve these goals. The report was careful to avoid casting the SCN in an operational role, and stopped short of proposing specific activities for the agencies, but nevertheless it said what was needed in an inescapable way, noting that within the last year, FAO, IFPRI, WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Human Development Center (Karachi) had each offered their own picture of future challenges. One bright note from the Oslo meeting was that the IAEA contributed to the core budget for the first time and has continued to do so to the current day.

The Oslo meeting proposed that the first draft should be circulated to a wider group, taking on board the comments made and to be put up for discussion again at the 1999 SCN meeting in Geneva. The Commission Report was not without its substantial controversy in the way it was constituted, funded and reported. The means of selection of members was not to the liking of all, and some believed that the extra budgetary funds specifically provided for the Commission could have better uses. At the Geneva meeting (26th Session) the Commission Report ran into criticism for different aspects from FAO, WHO and the World Bank. Some critical reviews had not reached the Secretariat of the Commission in a timely manner. Finally the critical agencies proposed that the Commission Report could not be issued under the SCN *imprimatur*, and should not be seen as endorsed by them.

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66 SCN 98 Commission Report Ending Malnutrition by 2020: An Agenda for Change in the Millennium. A draft for consideration by the ACC/SCN, March 1998.

#### 4.24 The Commission was launched with some controversy

The 1999 meeting was a stormy one but since then and slowly the Commission report has become a well respected document. It accelerated the idea of the life cycle approach to nutrition, and the importance of the inter-generational issues in nutrition. Any self respecting report on nutrition issues now uses the life cycle approach as a conceptual framework, and the circular diagram<sup>67</sup> and its variants<sup>68</sup> has now become very common. So from this earlier baptism of fire and in spite of institutional objections, there has emerged a set of very useful ideas.

#### 4.25 The end of the Second Era

The SCN's Second Era began with the Grottaferrata Retreat. At Grottaferrata, the SCN was reorganised to strengthen the Secretariat and take on more tasks. The period between the Geneva (1999) and Washington (2000) meetings marks the end of the Second Era. Similarly in 1999–2000 the SCN was reorganised, with the AGN put in abeyance at the 26th Session in Geneva of April 1999 and then abolished at the 27th Session in Washington in April 2000. An interim Steering Committee was appointed (the members were representatives of FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank, WHO, and representatives from an NGO, bilaterals, and the current AGN Chairman) which developed the Strategic Plan (that was later adopted by acclamation in April 2000 at the 27th session in Washington). This Committee met monthly by telephone without the Chair present, to develop the Strategic Plan. The main purpose of this Steering Committee was to guide a restructuring process that would further strengthen the activities of the SCN. Some respondents said that this change meant that the agencies felt for the first time they were in charge of the SCN. A Strategic Plan was formulated; the structure of a steering committee set up for governance, and then thematic working groups came into existence. So to emphasise the importance of the way in which the SCN is governed and structured, 1999 is taken as the end of the Second Era.

This may seem a rather dull way of marking eras, when strategy mission statements and the like are re-formulated. Those who have lived more closely with the SCN may well have their own subjective feelings as to when eras began and finished. Each view represents a different constituency with varying vested interests and impressions.

#### 4.26 And what about those 'personality' issues?

This history relies heavily on trying to understand the institutions involved, their mandates, resources and *modus operandi*. This is important both to learn

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67 See page 7 of the final report, dated February 2000.

68 Originally appearing on pages vi and 7 of the Commission Report.

'lessons' and also to document any repeated issue. Respondents, those even peripherally involved in the SCN often referred to the many 'personality issues' which were integral to implementation of work of the SCN. But what personality issues were they talking about? Were they those that had their origins in 1935 on the Health Organization of the League of Nations (HOLN) on definitions of malnutrition, those that arose in 1945 with the setting up of the UN agencies, or perhaps those of 1948 (as initially FAO and WHO tried to provide technical advice for UNICEF), or the clashes in the early 1970s over the protein 'fiasco', those in the mid 1970s when PAG was broken up: even these are only a sample of what happened before the SCN was even formed. But then in the SCN lifetime, could they be the personality issues through the 1980s as the World Bank and the UN agencies tried to work with each other, or those arising from the ICN in 1991–92, involving FAO and WHO often in opposition to other agencies, and when UNICEF was not allowed to be a co-sponsor, Dr Horwitz was not allowed to address the Conference or the disagreements over private sector involvement, or those as the bilateral agencies often 'cherry picked' SCN projects for special funding, or possibly those in 1995 when FAO withdrew funding, or again the disputes as the Millennium Commission was set up in 1998? Well that's a few from the first 20 years of the SCN as a start. All that said, informants noted that there have been fewer 'personality issues' over the years numbering 20 to 30 of the SCN and annual meetings have become less contentious.<sup>69</sup>

The point to make is that these issues were important, even critical at some key stages, but that many individuals acted on the basis of the directives they received from their superiors (which they may have accentuated), differences in their understanding of malnutrition, the strength of their position and their incentives for job security and promotion, and the work culture and mandate of the agency that employed them. Others acted out of a deep sense of social justice probably linked to frustration that they could not achieve more. Nutrition also does not have a tidy sectoral home, but agencies are organised along sectors (except UNICEF which focuses on the child and the mother, another source of tension in the SCN. Perhaps much of the problem (or opportunity?) of 'personalities' can be laid at the agency governance structures, which fall short of the nature of collaboration needed for the SCN to work well. Therefore, personalities become subsumed into the agency they represent and cannot be separated from them.

#### **4.27 Can eras of the SCN be characterised in some manner other than by changes in its governance?**

Can the eras of the SCN be characterised in some other manner? For example, by changing understanding of the causes of nutrition problems or

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69 As one respondent put it: 'you can always tell when the SCN is going through a happy period because you can go to the toilet during the sessions and not come back to find that another grouping has pushed through an agreement in your absence!'

more fundamental approaches to nutrition science? The PAG went out of existence because of how science understood the role of protein in malnutrition problems. Therefore, if eras could be characterised by preoccupation with nutrients, then the SCN's 'prehistory' can be characterised by the 'protein gap' and its gradual demise, the First Era by the energy gap with its gradual return to balance, and then the Second Era with micronutrients. The Third Era (1999–2009) sees a gradual return to fundamental issues of nutrition in the developing countries – poverty and the multiple associated deprivations and actions that can be taken to at least ameliorate the 'nutritional' impact of the cluster of deprivations, all through the lens of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Given the great deal of interest in the global nutrition architecture at the present time (see section 5 on the Third Era) there have been various characterisations of how the scene has evolved. Urban Jonsson (Jonsson 2006) has a view of several eras, and maybe this better reflects the world where there is an endless re-configuration of what matters as donor funds need to be distributed to short political time frames and scientists and other nutrition professionals argue among themselves about what works.<sup>70</sup> Jonsson's 'eras' overlap a bit with those proposed in this history of the SCN; they also relate strongly to the practice of preventing young child malnutrition and undernutrition as a UNICEF view. First was the period well before 1950, where the development of science in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lead to nutrition as a science, the fact that certain foods had a remedying effect on disease has been known since ancient times, especially vitamins. Second, there is the era of protein deficiency (1950–1970), based on reports in the 1930s and 1940s about *kwashiorkor*, the result of protein deficiency, and by 1954 the protein deficiency paradigm was well established. But by 1973 there was strong criticism of this paradigm, and in 1977 the PAG was abolished.

Third, Jonsson identifies the Era of Multisectoral Nutrition Planning and National Nutrition Policies (1973–1980), based on the realisation that solving child malnutrition needed a broader approach, to include social, economic, cultural and political aspects. The science of nutrition was too narrow. However, the approach collapsed at the end of the decade, mostly because it was too elaborate and few governments were interested in developing the structures required. Some principles of this era do survive, however. There was also increasing emphasis on prevention of malnutrition leading to primary health care and Community Based nutrition (1974–1990). In the FAO, the Fourth World Food Survey of 1977 showed that the problem was not total food supply but unequal distribution, lack of access by poor people, and poverty was singled out as the major cause.

Era Five for Jonsson was the emerging normative consensus of 1990–1995, which started in 1990 with the World Summit for Children, and which generated goals for women and children; and when the Convention on the Rights of the

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70 Unfortunately, what has been lacking is the availability of good evaluation data to give some indication of 'what works', a feature of the current debates on what sort of study is needed to be useful.

Child entered into force. But then there was declining interest in protein-energy malnutrition and the new focus on micronutrient malnutrition in Era Six (1995–2005).<sup>71</sup>

Era Seven (see later in this history) is the launching of the new initiatives, including the 2006 World Bank nutrition initiative, 'Repositioning Nutrition', WFP and UNICEF (ECHUI/REACH) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) initiatives including '*The Lancet Series*' and re-examination of the global nutrition architecture. Much of what the HOLN, the joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Nutrition, PAG and SCN has convened and published can be laid like tracing paper over these eras. But there is one broad shift over these multiple eras that has been incubated largely by the SCN. This is the shift towards normative development and universal values, and the strengthening of the human rights movement with respect to nutrition (Kracht, Barth Eide and Jonsson 2007).

In the 19th Session in Rome (1992), the SCN introduced the topic of 'nutrition and ethics', and this was followed by the establishment of the Working Group on Nutrition, Ethics and Human Rights at the following Session (20th, Geneva, 1993). At the time hardly any other UN development agency saw the need to bring an explicit ethical and human rights perspective to their assistance work. This Working Group still functions within the SCN, and like other SCN Working Groups pursues its mandate between sessions with the support of groups outside the UN system. This work gained momentum, supported by the renewed focus on the right to adequate food by the World Food Summit of 1996, the proposal by the UN Secretary General in 1997 to mainstream human rights into UN activities generally, the 26th Session of 1999 at UNHCHR with the selection of the subject for the Symposium being the 'Substance and politics of a human rights approach to food and nutrition policies and programming', and the successful completion of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food in 2004, and formally adopted by the FAO Council.

One can see, therefore, major changes in approach from nutrition as part of involving a 'basic needs' approach, developed over the 1970s, but then sidelined by the priorities of structural adjustment in the 1980s, with some return to nutrition as part of 'investment in human capital' in the 1990s, and now into an ethical approach, recognising that food and adequate nutrition needs no further justification as it is a basic human right. The SCN has done the most to encourage the debate and the implementation of its implications. The real shared goal has always been and always must be the betterment of the human condition of the affected hundreds of millions.

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71 It was difficult to recognise causes in the shift from PEM to micronutrients malnutrition, but there were various reasons. There were the results of research that demonstrated the impact of deficiencies in iodine, vitamin A and iron, linked to prevention technologies that were developed at low cost. The World Bank was convinced that these interventions were cost effective, while for many large scale efforts to prevent PEM, impact was less than expected.



## 5 The Third Era (2000–2009)

Professor Beaton closed his draft of the SCN history in 1998 by saying that the role of the SCN is to discuss how collaboration among the agencies might be synergistic in addressing the identified challenges of nutrition. In contrast to the mid 1980s, he hoped the SCN by the late 1990s was mature enough, and sufficiently self-confident to take up the gauntlet and move to meet the challenge of harmonisation of thinking and approaches. If it did this, the SCN would have moved towards addressing an extremely important part of the mandate assigned by ECOSOC when the SCN was originally created, achieving in the Third Era that which was assiduously avoided in the First Era and elusively unachieved in the Second Era. Whether or not the specific goals suggested in the Millennium Commission report were accepted was much less important than whether the SCN agreed that common goals and harmonised approaches to achievement of the goals are needed and this is a very important responsibility of the SCN. The discussion of this most recent era tries to address itself to some of these expectations.

### 5.1 The AGN is held in abeyance and a strategic plan starts to take shape

At the Geneva Session in 1999, the AGN was held in abeyance for one year pending the recommendations of the steering committee. With the growth in professional nutrition expertise within the UN agencies and bilaterals themselves, the AGN was not seen as necessary. Historically, the AGN was introduced into the tripartite structure of the ACC/SCN at the request of the bilaterals to provide independent advice to the UN agencies. The AGN met for the last time in April 1999 in Geneva under the chair of Professor Ricardo Uauy. The Group advised on the conflict of interest statements, the fourth, and future, reports on the world nutrition situation, and made further comments on issues such as a working group on zinc nutrition, the RNIS, and the Commission report.

Opinion is divided as to whether abolition of the AGN was a good thing. Some say that the SCN has now lost its independent intellectual cutting edge, while others believed that the AGN was a rather divisive institution, with too many ‘grandees’, following their own research agendas. With agency staff and those on the working groups, there has been a growth in the intellectual input in the SCN arena, but this may not be sufficiently focused without the AGN. The Geneva session was also marked by a willingness of FAO to reconsider its funding position as they had regarded the changes in the SCN as being positive. Therefore the Third Era started on an optimistic note. Also a draft of a strategic plan – the first seen in the SCN – was under review.

A major view of the strategic plan was that the SCN was not sufficiently country-driven and did not acknowledge the difficulty of country-level collaboration by UN agencies. Also, by this meeting the number of NGOs was beginning to increase; at Geneva in 2006 there were 25 represented and at the Rome Session of 2007 this had grown to 39, with civil society comprising the

bulk of the participants, with about 400 people attending. They have an important role at country level and with agency funding cutbacks, represent a source of strong nutrition expertise. NGOs could also see they might be better coordinated if an NGO group fell under the ACC umbrella. Information exchange was mutually useful.

## 5.2 The role and activities of the Working Groups

There had also been a growth in the number of Working Groups. There are now nine in number: Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding, Capacity Development in Food and Nutrition, Household Food Security, Micronutrients, Nutrition in Emergencies, Nutrition, Ethics and Human Rights, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS, Nutrition of School Age Children, and Nutrition throughout the Life Cycle. Working Groups have continued to the present day with some modifications, addition and subtractions as one of the most important roles for the SCN, providing a meeting place for the technical experts in any one of these fields. Some are clearly more active than others. The effort that the Group puts into its activities are voluntary and employers may not provide incentives to devote time to it: but the WG's popularity in the pre-SCN annual session in terms of attendance shows the value they have to many people, especially from developing countries and NGOs. However, the SCN's efforts to institute three cross-cutting task forces<sup>72</sup> across the Steering Committee base have made very modest progress up to 2009.

There have been some notable successes among the Working Groups, part of the aspect of the 'slow burners' within SCN activities and the fact that (like the micronutrient activity in the Second Era) activities are spun off to other institutions. The WG on Nutrition in Emergencies had very productive meetings, with the development of Community Based Therapeutic care of Severe Acute malnutrition. The SCN WG played a key role in getting people to agree on pushing this agenda forward. The WG on Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding did valuable work on establishing standards of infant feeding and the Protocols for Infant Feeding in Emergencies arose out of SCN meetings; the WHO Technical Advisory Group on Nutrition and HIV also arose out of the SCN working group. This led to clarification on infant feeding regimes for mothers with HIV.

## 5.3 The Strategic Plan is adopted... with some new definitions of representatives

In 2000 the Fourth World Nutrition Situation Report was published, developed in collaboration with IFPRI. By now these reports had become a fixture in the reporting of international development and the authoritative site for nutrition information.

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72 Development of Integrated Approaches, Advocacy, Communication and Partnership Building, and Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation.



The SCN Strategic Plan was adopted at the 27th Session in Washington. The mandate of the SCN was re-stated as: (i) raising awareness of nutrition problems and mobilising commitment to solve them, at global, regional and national levels; (ii) refining the direction, increasing the scale and strengthening the coherence and impact of actions against malnutrition worldwide and; (iii) promoting cooperation among UN agencies and partner organisations in support of national efforts to end malnutrition.

The Strategic Plan emphasised that the SCN had been unique in bringing together three groups of participants: UN agencies, bilaterals, and civil society/NGOs. The working groups were strengthened and became the heart of the SCN. The Steering Committee now governed the SCN. Another significant step taken at the Washington Meeting was to redefine 'bilateral' to include representatives of any country (donor or recipients) and for all to be seen as partners. The Washington Session also saw the first plenary statement by the NGOs. Finally at the end of the 27th session in 2000, Professor Sir Richard Jolly stepped down as Chair. Many saw him as having an energising influence on the SCN with a constant stream of ideas, and his influence going back to before his time as Chair, most notably to the Tokyo session when he with others had a major influence on IMF policy. He handed over to Namanga Ngongi.

#### **5.4 But reform now from within the ACC and the SCN morphs into the SCN**

But while the SCN was trying to re-invent itself, the ACC was undergoing reform in New York. In 2001, the UN decided that the ACC should move away from the idea of having permanent subsidiary machinery while recognising the need for continued inter-agency coordination. So the ACC embarked on a year of transition, while its committees would be invited to provide their views on their work to the High Level Committee on Programmes (the successor to the CCPOQ) of the CEB. New names were needed for the SCN (should it continue to exist), one proposed of which was the UN Forum on Nutrition, which better reflects its role as the senior committee on nutrition.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the ACC reform process brought only a few small changes in the functioning of the SCN. The ACC became the CEB, the UN's Chief Executive's Board to which the SCN (under a new name yet to be decided) would report occasionally. The fact that the SCN did not need to report in a regular way was to weaken it in this era.

Moreover, these changes brought no new light at the end of the tunnel for financing for the Secretariat and the SCN continued to function almost from day-to-day in this regard. In 2002 core contributions were at a historic low with UNDP having ceased contributions. One consequence of weak funding was that the SCN was becoming more and more focused on the Annual Meeting as its major activity with little appearing to happen at other times. The renaming of

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73 Proposed several years earlier by Professor Sir Richard Jolly.

the SCN appeared to be the only major change thrust on it by ACC reform and in the end the SCN was renamed the SCN – Standing Committee on Nutrition!

### **5.5 The description of ‘bilaterals’ is widened**

But there was a significant internal reform, and it is difficult to understand today why it did not happen earlier: at the 28th Session in 2001 in Nairobi, the ‘bilateral partners’ included representatives not only from European and US donors but also from ministries in Gambia, Kenya, Mali and South Africa. Then another change of guard as at the 29th Session in Berlin, Namanga Ngongi stepped down as Chair to be replaced later in the year, in August 2002, by his WFP colleague, Catherine Bertini. Soon after, Ms Bertini was appointed soon after to be UN Under-Secretary General for Management, which was the highest position an SCN Chair has held, and a factor which was to bode well for the SCN in terms of its visibility within the labyrinthine UN bureaucracy in New York. The 30th Session in Chennai in March 2003 was notable because it was the first time in the SCN’s history that the annual session was hosted by a civil society organisation, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation.

### **5.6 The relationship between the SCN and bilateral donors**

The SCN is a body with UN agencies providing core finance but the bilateral agencies, governments, have been valuable partners as funders. As with many relationships within the SCN there have been some tense times, often reflecting the general tensions that exist between UN agencies and donors, such as concerns by agencies of being donor-driven, and donors wanting to see more collaborative work, accountability and results. The relationships were most strained in the lead up to the ICN. Generally donor bilaterals have not funded core costs of the SCN as they believe that this should be done by the UN agencies through the funds that they provide to them as part of regular budget allocations. At other times, bilaterals have provided extra budgetary funds for specific projects, and many instances have been provided in this report. Further strains arose when these projects appeared to be the result of bilateral negotiation between the SCN Secretariat. Overall, this has sometimes lead to accusations that the bilaterals have been choosing their favourite topics and using the SCN as a mini UN agency in itself, with its normative function bolstered by extra budgetary funds.

Over the last five years the bilateral funding has declined to virtually nothing. Even so, many of the Western donor bilaterals have attended the annual meetings, but even this of late has declined. Among others, Netherlands, Germany, Canada and Sweden have basically stopped attending. There are two reasons. One is a political shift in some countries, and second the ministry and adviser persons who over the years have supported the SCN have left their posts and their replacements are not sympathetic towards the SCN. Within donor ministries also, nutrition is a neglected topic falling between health and agriculture, and with sporadic attention from the development ministry, with civil servants espousing nutrition in development ministries, and

like their UN agency counterparts, often finding themselves isolated. Now the majority of the bilaterals come from developing countries and the total number of attendees has risen. Although they do not normally contribute financially, they can provide significant resources in hosting meetings.

### **5.7 Having a strategic plan means that time is devoted to evaluations and revisions!**

With the new governance structure there was a feeling of more involvement by partners in the SCN and some transparency at last as a result. Respondents have said they felt more committed to the SCN at this time, even at the cost of more dialogue. A mid-term performance review of the SCN Secretariat was carried out by Eileen Kennedy in April 2002 to review the roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat as set out in the Strategic Plan (Kennedy 2002). Some of the findings had a familiar ring: that respondents wanted the SCN to do more, but that clearly there was not the funding available to do these tasks... 'agencies want the SCN Secretariat to achieve more in a climate of dwindling financial resources', as the report notes. The review also stated that communications with the wider development community remain poor.

By 2003, participants in the SCN generally felt happier about its activities and believed it had built up a real track record in its publications. Many of the Working Groups were enthusiastically attended by their participants with an excellent exchange of information. But still the focus was on 'show and tell', and, once again, with little appearing to happen between annual sessions. Enhanced collaboration between agencies seemed as elusive as ever, with agencies retreating into their mandates when shared working was proposed. At field level, with the introduction of greater harmonisation of UN agencies, the main planning document (the UN Development Assistance Framework or UNDAF) appears to be an excellent vehicle for joint-agency nutrition work, but that hope has not been realised, as a result of weak incentives and unaligned agency governance, despite the enthusiasm of those in field offices to collaborate (Longhurst 2006).

The main problem is that SCN participants often do not have the pull in their own agencies to make SCN proposals stick. At the 23rd Session in 2003, the Strategic Plan was revised to include the different aspects of partnerships structure; the increased importance of the MDGs, rights-based approaches and governance, and the dynamic developments in civil society.

### **5.8 The Tivoli Retreat**

In July 2003 Sonya Rabeneck stepped down as Technical Secretary to be replaced a year later by Roger Shrimpton. This meant that running of the SCN Secretariat as well as the organisation of the 31st Session in New York in March 2004 fell heavily on Jane Hedley, the administrator of the SCN Secretariat, who had been in place since the Secretariat was moved from Rome in 1987. Jane has been the great unsung hero of the SCN's work, over

almost two decades, providing the continuity of response across the various Secretaries and other transitions. She left the Secretariat in 2007.

The 31st Session had been preceded by another of the SCN's informal retreats in small-sized Italian towns close to Rome, this time Tivoli, in January 2004. The Retreat was attended by Ms Bertini, Kraisid Tontesirin (FAO), Rainier Gross (UNICEF), Mila McLachlan (World Bank), Bruno de Benoist (WHO), Patrick Webb (WFP), Sean Kennedy (IFAD) on behalf of the other UN agencies, and Flavio Valente (NGOs), and Arne Oshaug (bilaterals). Several ideas were floated at Tivoli and several of these were taken up within the new Strategic Framework. The main proposal was to appoint a senior level policy advisory board as a mechanism to obtain political recognition for nutrition at the highest levels in agencies and governments. Other proposals also included a stronger emphasis on the MDGs, stronger integration of the human rights approach, and to open procedures for the private sector to become a fourth SCN partner. Progress on the senior high level policy advisory board was deferred at the 32nd Session in Brasilia in March 2005, and then rejected at that time. Nor has this moved forward subsequently and the Steering Committee has continued to function in its current format.

A major issue of whether the private sector/food industry should become a fourth SCN partner is slowly moving forward year by year. A task force developed a policy for regulating the private sector during the period 2004 to 2005, and at the 34th Session in Rome, there was agreement to establish a working group to take forward private sector engagement. The stage has been reached that a discussion document exists as to how the SCN should interact with the private sector.

## **5.9 And with a strategy comes a work plan**

In 2004, the Secretariat drafted an Action Plan for 2005–2010 and a new Strategic Framework, and the Tivoli recommendations were worked into this. This was presented at the 32nd Session in Brasilia in March 2005. Between the 32nd and 33rd Sessions, the Steering Committee separated the strategic framework from the action plan. The former contains the rules and regulations while the action plan has a horizon of six years with two-year rolling plans. Key points of the new Framework were to support country ownership and leadership, work with the global framework of the MDGs, to promote human rights-based development and good governance, and to promote the integration of nutrition in the national, regional and global development agendas (e.g. the UNDAFs – the UN Development Assistance Frameworks). The five key activity areas were to be: (i) to develop and implement a strategy for high level advocacy and strategic communication; (ii) to track and report on progress towards achieving the MDGs and other nutrition-related goals; (iii) to facilitate integration of nutrition into MDG related activities at the country level; (iv) to mainstream human rights approaches into the work of the SCN and; (v) to identify key scientific and operational gaps. The strategic plans were a major step forward in transparency for the SCN and its Secretariat.

Readers who have managed to get this far in this history will feel that the Third Era has certainly been characterised by one thing: a lot more paperwork, strategising, reviewing and performance assessing. Among other things, this reflects the results-based management and budgeting efforts that the UN (and public sectors generally) have been experiencing. Time alone will tell whether it has achieved its objective of strengthening the links between the SCN and country level action for improving nutrition. But in the Third Era the activities of the *SCN News* (18 issues), Working Groups, Fifth and Sixth (in process) World Nutrition Situation Reports and the Nutrition Information in Crisis Situations reports all continued.

### **5.10 The country case studies prepared for the 32nd Session in 2005**

The Symposium in Brasilia – entitled ‘Realizing the Right to Adequate Food to Help Achieve the MDGs’, covered four country case studies on how to strengthen national nutrition plans to achieve the MDGs within a rights-based context. These case studies were carried out in Angola, Brazil, Bolivia and Mozambique. They showed it was possible to position food and nutrition within a legal framework and hold governments accountable, and the studies also recalled earlier work by the SCN on country case studies. These case studies were regarded as major achievements given the shortage of funds that the SCN was experiencing, and seen as a great credit to Roger Shrimpton. It was the first time that country level issues had been brought into mainstream discussions at an SCN Session. The countries signed a collaboration agreement, of great symbolic importance and a real initiative.

At the 33rd Geneva session in March 2006, the time of Catherine Bertini as Chair came to an end. Her tenure was seen by many as very positive: ‘she was willing to knock heads together’ as one respondent noted. She was replaced by Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF. Many of those interviewed at the Geneva meeting noted that the Committee was going through a harmonious period. FAO increased its core contribution, although others were tailing off, such as the World Bank. The number of bilaterals attending SCN meetings and their level of interest is higher but those bilaterals who usually provided funds to the SCN have decreased, mostly due to political reasons.

The governance of the SCN is changing as international nutrition seems to be splitting. Prior to 2002, the SCN reported to the ACC programme committee (CCPOQ). With the loss of a formal reporting relationship to the Chief Executive’s Board (CEB) – which replaced the ACC – or its high level programme committee, and the difficulties involved in establishing a relationship, the importance of nutrition inside the UN has become more uncertain, even though the importance of nutrition is widely recognised. Unlike other partnerships such as Roll Back Malaria, GAIN and the Global Funds, the SCN does not have a high-level quasi-external board. International nutrition seemed in the earlier part of this Era to be fractionating with the development of these parallel structures to the UN.

### **5.11 The SCN has the habitual ‘no funds’ situation and this leads to more internal reviews**

At the time of writing, it is too early to claim that a new era for the SCN has started. Further major organisational restructuring did not happen at the 34th Session in Rome in February 2007 nor at the 35th Session in Hanoi in March 2008. Many reviews have been started inside and outside the SCN. The Steering Committee in July 2008 proposed restructuring, notably splitting the very large and diverse NGO/Civil Society constituency into three new constituencies: NGOs, academia, and the private sector. In 2009 for the first time, a large annual session was not held, instead there being two smaller meetings: two meetings of the Steering Committee were held at the IUNS in Bangkok in October with a satellite meeting afterwards, and another special consultation in Brussels in November, co-organised by the EU, DFID, SCF UK and the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University.

The Steering Committee in Rome in July 2008 viewed SCN's role as harmonisation and not coordination, best achieved through knowledge sharing and information exchange, within the SCN Forum, with a main focus on operational and programmatic knowledge, and lessons learned. All agreed it should remain a UN-led forum, but lack of any higher reporting relationship since 2001 has weakened it, demanding more proactive action from the Secretariat and the Chair, and reducing buy-in from within the UN agencies. Also, there is always some unease among UN agencies that the SCN is constituted with three partners, i.e. UN agencies themselves, bilaterals, and NGOs/CSOs. There is a need to re-establish links to higher levels of the UN, such as the HLPC of the CEB or even the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis.

The SCN Secretariat had prepared a discussion document on a review of the SCN for the Rome Steering Committee meeting. This is a useful document as it analyses the functions and roles of the SCN in terms of those proposed by ECOSOC as:

- the What? Policy harmonisation, translating science into policy;
- the How? Policy harmonisation at the regional/national level with emphasis on policy into programmers;
- the Why? Advocate for increased importance;
- the How are we doing? Monitor and report periodically.

The first seven years of the SCN concentrated on the ‘What?’ but with limited outputs. The Second Era more closely followed what was asked of it by ECOSOC and with its publications contributed to the ‘What?’, the ‘How?’ and the ‘How are we doing?’ Subsequent proposals such as the 1995 evaluation and the SCN Millennium Commission strongly proposed more activity on the ‘How?’ – along with ‘Where we should go’. But when proposals are made to do more of the ‘How?’, partners get uneasy as they see the SCN moving into agency territory. Of course, this also requires much more resources than the SCN can command, and this conundrum is not only one that the SCN has to



grapple with. Everybody has a different view of the 'How?', whatever area of nutrition they work in.

In 2008, with a world food crisis again requiring concerted action, FAO held a High Level Conference on World Food Security in June, leading to setting up a High Level Task Force which met in October 2008. The SCN organised a side event on 'The Impact of High Food Prices on Nutrition.' Objectives of the side event were to inform CFS members about the effects of high food prices on the nutrition status of different groups, and stimulate a debate on the possible actions that might help allay the negative effects of the crisis.

### **5.12 But in 2008 and 2009 reviews outside SCN came thick and fast on the international nutrition architecture**

In the Third Era, a major change has been that there are far more players on the global nutrition scene than ever before. Also, large foundations, most notably the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) have come on the scene as new donors willing to take new approaches. *The Lancet* has published a series of papers on Maternal and Child Undernutrition, with funding from the BMGF. The aim of these papers was to catalyse the international community to bring nutrition more squarely on the global agenda. In this Nutrition Series (LNS) there were five papers, the fourth reviewing effective action at the national level (Bryce, Coitinho, Darnton-Hill, Pelletier and Pinstrup Andersen 2008) and the fifth paper covering effective action at the international level (Morris, Cogill and Uauy 2008). Although there are criticisms that the LNS takes a rather narrow and overly medical view of nutrition problems, not paying sufficient attention to food and care problems and women's work issues for example, it has served to raise the profile of the nutrition problems of maternal and child health.

Paper Five said that the current international nutrition system – made up of international and donor agencies, academia, civil society, and the private sector – is fragmented and dysfunctional, and that reform was needed so that it can do the four functions proposed by the authors: stewardship; mobilisation of financial resources; direct provision of nutrition services at time of disaster or conflict; and human and institutional resource strengthening. The authors further said that current processes for producing normative guidance are laborious and duplicative, and fail to produce guidance that is prioritised, succinct and evidence-based. Funding produced by international donors was grossly insufficient and poorly targeted. Paper Five wanted to propose a new global governance structure that can provide greater accountability and participation for civil society and the private sector, and enhanced linkages with national level processes, so that country level priorities are better reflected in international normative guidance, donor funding, research and advanced training.

But Paper Five proposals for actions do not seem to match these problems: proposing a meeting to identify options for a structure that would more effectively represent supranational organisations, the private sector, and civil



society as well as facilitating dialogue with national actors from high-burden countries. For the SCN they propose that it needs to become a forum that makes UN agencies accountable for results. Many of the SCN's most dedicated attendees will be well aware of the problems raised. The LNS is much more about the 'what' and the 'why' of improving maternal and child nutrition, and less about the 'how'.

In 2008–09 a useful exercise was carried out under the SCN umbrella, but managed by WHO and funded by the BMGF. This was the landscape analysis on countries' readiness to accelerate action in nutrition (see *SCN News* 37), and it undertook country assessments in six countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guatemala, Madagascar, Peru and South Africa) that are part of the 36 high-burden<sup>74</sup> countries.

Other reviews of the international nutrition architecture were also taking place. An outsider and informal review was convened at Tufts University for two days at the end of January 2008. A small group of senior professionals with diverse experiences in international nutrition focused on defining current needs for action in nutrition and assessing gaps and overlapping mandates, functions and goals. With reference to the SCN, the group identified its potential for addressing gaps and performing better in meeting defined needs. But its recommendations were not fully pursued, either at the Hanoi meeting or anywhere else.

Also outside the SCN, in November 2008, an informal meeting of selected participants was convened by the BMGF following a study by the Centre for Global Development (CGD) (Levine and Kuczynski 2009). This also drew attention to the new actors and the increased interest of the established ones, for example the World Bank's nutrition strategy, *Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development* (2006), which with the EU, Ireland and UK DFID have lead the process called a Global Action Plan for Nutrition. However, in many ways the World Bank remains at arm's length from the SCN. UNICEF and the WFP have also shown more interest in nutrition than previously with the new initiative of REACH (an initiative that promotes interventions to end child hunger and malnutrition). Clearly, it is time to re-examine the global system for governing food, nutrition and agriculture, all of which fall between the cracks of the current global governance structure.

### **5.13 After the Brussels meeting, the SCN ended 2009 on a positive note**

After the EC-hosted meeting, there was renewed commitment of support for the SCN. Looking back from this point many things are still uncertain as agencies have largely stopped funding the SCN and the Secretariat has only been able to survive because no Technical Secretary was appointed in 2009. But looking ahead, the very fact that the EC is supporting SCN meetings is

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74 Defined as countries with more than 20 per cent stunting rates.

remarkable. It was recognised that in this new global architecture the SCN still has the potential to be the leading structure for creating inter-agency synergies at the global level.

## 6 Epilogue: the future of the SCN: 2010–2015

This history ends on a generally positive note for the SCN. As at the beginning of 2010, the SCN has some resources and a new website. More UN agencies than ever before are interested in nutrition along with many bilaterals and many NGOs. One can only hope that this interest, commitment and support for the SCN lasts. It provides an ending of qualified optimism.

What can be said of the SCN after 30 years? This is a history after all, not a measured piece on the adequacy of global nutrition architecture for future challenges. But this history has documented all of the proposals and some have been more relevant to the time than others. All seem to have different ideas but none has clearly said the SCN has no function.

The SCN has been the great survivor: it has been one of the UN's important innovations, generating interaction with nutrition professionals and bilaterals as well as working for focus and harmonisation among the agencies. It has many accomplishments of which it can be proud. However, for the SCN itself, the actual beneficial impacts lie outside the SCN itself and are often hard to document and easy to forget. By lasting it has seen through to fruition what could be called 'slow burners': the importance of the life cycle approach to nutrition, the important role of nutrition in HIV/AIDS prevention and care, the rights approach, the food-health-care approach as determinants of malnutrition, and the continuing understanding that nutrition is a central development issue. It has led the way with global statistical estimates of the size of nutritional problems and has also been a catalyst for global action to tackle micronutrient deficiencies. Now with more growing interest among the UN agencies it can continue to serve as a valuable 'big tent', though it may still struggle to incorporate these, notably the private sector. Despite many wobbly moments the SCN is still running.

As a model for areas beyond nutrition, the SCN has shown that information sharing and encouraging others to do things 'outside the SCN' can work and be remarkably cost effective. It is unique among the UN coordinating mechanisms, functioning as a mini-agency: it does not do much coordinating but it does help coherence and cohesion and does a lot of other things well. Despite the difficulties, the way it forms alliances between different groups is a success story.

Those who contributed to this history identify its pluses as:

- its quality publications,
- its technical working groups, (including the earlier AGN) and;

- some harmonisation of key nutrition concepts and strategies resulting in less confusion as to what to do at the national level.

On the negative side, the SCN has not succeeded in establishing genuine inter-agency collaboration but that has almost certainly more to do with the structure, mandates and governance of the agencies themselves rather than the efforts of the SCN. As the UN has shown modest achievements in harmonisation of activities so the SCN can hold itself up as a good example of harmonisation in the area of nutritional action. Harmonisation (which has its own transaction costs) needs some reform of the structure of the agencies themselves, and on top of that sympathetic senior management is also needed. Agencies do not want to be held accountable to the SCN and often to anybody else for that matter. It is probably for these reasons that the SCN has held more closely to its normative functions of pushing for scientific consensus and advocacy.

Those who attend the SCN are enthusiasts; but the people that these enthusiasts need to influence rarely attend. That the SCN has failed to pull in policymakers more closely is a negative. Senior government leaders and parliamentarians should have been included more often in some meetings. Those who attend from agencies and governments do not have much clout within their own agencies and ministries. They are advisers and advisers do not manage budgets or set policy. Added to this, policymakers blow hot and cold on nutrition. Nutrition units are often weak in their own agencies. Then there is the nutrition profession itself which lies uneasily between health, food and agriculture (and others). And within the nutrition profession, international nutrition in developing countries is secondary to rich country nutrition. With all of these slippery variables the SCN has done well to achieve as much as it has.

# Appendix 1 People: Chairs, Technical Secretaries, members of the AGN and Chairs of the working groups

## A1.1 SCN Sessions

Venue	Date	Session	Chair
Rome	September 1977	1st	Mr G. Kermode, FAO
Rome	December 1977	2nd	Mr R. Heyward, UNICEF
Rome	March 1978	3rd	Mr R. Heyward, UNICEF
New York	October 1978	4th	Mr R. Heyward, UNICEF
Geneva	February 1979	5th	Mr R. Heyward, UNICEF
Paris	February 1980	6th	Mr R. Heyward, UNICEF
Rome	March 1981	7th	Mr R. Heyward, UNICEF
Bangkok	February 1982	8th	Mr J.R. Evans, World Bank
Copenhagen	March 1983	9th	Mr J.R. Evans, World Bank
Rome	March 1984	10th	Mr M. Mensah, IFAD
Nairobi	February 1985	11th	Mr M. Mensah, IFAD
Tokyo	April 1986	12th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Washington	March 1987	13th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Geneva	February 1988	14th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
New York	February 1989	15th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Paris	February 1990	16th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Geneva	July 1990	17th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
New York	February 1991	18th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Rome	February 1992	19th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Geneva	February 1993	20th	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
New York	March 1994	21st	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Washington	March 1995	22nd	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
Accra	February 1996	23rd	Dr R. Jolly, UNDP
Kathmandu	March 1997	24th	Dr R. Jolly, UNDP
Oslo	March 1998	25th	Dr R. Jolly, UNDP
Geneva	April 1999	26th	Dr R. Jolly, UNDP
Washington	April 2000	27th	Dr R. Jolly, UNDP
Nairobi	April 2001	28th	Dr N. Ngongi, WFP
Berlin	March 2002	29th	Dr N. Ngongi, WFP
Chennai	March 2003	30th	Ms C. Bertini, WFP
New York	March 2004	31st	Ms C. Bertini, UN
Brasilia	March 2005	32nd	Ms C. Bertini, UN
Geneva	March 2006	33rd	Ms C. Bertini, U. Syracuse
Rome	February 2007	34th	Ms A. Veneman, UNICEF
Hanoi	March 2008	35th	Ms A. Veneman, UNICEF
Bangkok and Brussels	October and November 2009	mini-meetings	Mr A. Mueller, FAO

## A1.2 Chairs

Date	Name
April 1977–December 1977	Mr G. Kermode, FAO
1977–1982	Mr R. Heyward, UNICEF
1982–1984	Mr J. Evans, World Bank
1985–1986	Mr M. Mensah, IFAD
1986–1995	Dr A. Horwitz, PAHO
1995–2000	Dr R. Jolly, UNICEF
2000–2002	Dr N. Ngongi, WFP
2002–2006	Ms C. Bertini, WFP
2006–2008	Ms A. Veneman, UNICEF
December 2008–	Mr A. Mueller, FAO

## A1.3 Technical Secretaries

Date	Name
June 1978–August 1985	Dr Leslie Burgess
July 1986–July 1996	Dr John Mason
February 1997–July 2003	Dr Sonya Rabeneck
July 2004–December 2008	Dr Roger Shrimpton

## A1.4 Members and Affiliations of the AGN

Please note that records of members of the AGN prior between 1977 and 1984 are not available.

Years	Members
1985	Dr A. Horwitz (PAHO) (Chair), Dr G. Beaton (University of Toronto), Dr Chen Chun-Ming (Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine), Professor J.-P. Habicht (Cornell University), Dr Achola Pala-Okeyo (University of Nairobi)
1986–1987	Professor J.-P. Habicht (Chair), Dr G. Beaton, Dr Chen Chun-Ming, Dr J. Kevany (University of Dublin), Dr A. Khattab (Khartoum University), Dr Achola Pala-Okeyo, Dr Soekiman (BAPPENAS, Indonesia)
1988–1989	Professor J. Kevany (Chair), Dr G. Beaton, Dr Chen Chun-Ming, Ms M. Griffiths (Manoff), Professor J.-P. Habicht, Dr C. Juridmande de Bialostozky (Mexican Federal District), Dr A. Khattab, Dr Achola Pala-Okeyo, Professor R. Martorell (Stanford University), Dr Soekiman, Mr K. Venugopal (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India)
1990–1991	Professor R. Martorell (Chair), Dr G. Beaton, Dr Chen Chun-Ming, Ms M. Griffiths, Professor J. Kevany, Dr A. Khattab, Mr S. Maxwell (IDS, Sussex University), Dr Achola Pala-Okeyo, Dr Soekiman, Dr J. Tagwireyi (Ministry of Health, Zimbabwe), Mr K. Venugopal, Dr Gabor Zajhas (Institute of Food Hygiene and Nutrition, Budapest)

1992–1993	Professor R. Martorell (Chair), Mr K. Bailey, Dr G. Beaton, Ms M. Griffiths, Mr R. Heyward (UNICEF), Dr J. Jervell (Rikshospitalet, Oslo), Professor J. Kevany, Mr S. Maxwell, Dr J. Tagwireyi, Dr Gabor Zajhas
1994–1995	Professor R. Martorell (Chair), Mr K. Bailey, Dr G. Beaton, Mr R. Heyward, Dr J. Jervell, Mr S. Maxwell, Dr J. Tagwireyi
1996–1997	Dr J. Tagwireyi (Chair), Dr G. Beaton, Dr S. Chowdhury, Dr L. Haddad (IFPRI), Dr E. Kennedy (USDA), Dr J. Jervell, Dr L. Marovatsanga (Harare University), Mr S. Maxwell, Prof R. Oniang'o (Jomo Kenyatta University), Professor K. Tontisirin (Mahidol University), Professor R. Uauy (Institute Nutrition and Food Technology, University of Chile)
1998–1999	Professor R. Uauy (Chair), Dr S. Chowdhury, Dr L. Haddad, Dr E. Kennedy, Dr J. Jervell, Dr L. Marovatsanga, Prof R. Oniang'o, Professor K. Tontisirin

### A1.5 Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Working Groups from the mid 1990s

Working Group	Chairs	Vice Chairs/Rapporteurs
Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding	Lida Lhotska Miriam Labbok David Clark	Felicity Savage Randeh Saadeh Reina Buijs Isatou Jallow Kay Dewey
Capacity Development in Food and Nutrition	Cutberto Gaza Patrick Stover	Barbara Underwood David Sanders Hans Schoenenberger Emorn Wasantwisut
Household Food Security	Bill Clay Krasid Tontisirin Florence Egal	Lawrence Haddad Shakuntala Thilsted Jeanineke Dahl Kristensen Helene Deret
Micronutrients	Ian Darnton Hill Frances Davidson Martin Bloem	Bruno de Benoist Werner Schultink Jacques Berger Gary Gleason
Nutrition in Emergencies	Anna Taylor Marjatta Tolvanen Saskia van der Kam Fathia Abdallah Caroline Wilkinson	Sultana Khanum Caroline Abia Zita Weise Prinzo Caroline Abia Anne Callanan

<b>Working Group</b>	<b>Chairs</b>	<b>Vice Chairs/Rapporteurs</b>
Nutrition, Ethics and Human Rights	Urban Jonsson Margret Vidar	Wenche Barth Eide Uwe Kracht Federica Donati Marlis Lindecke Flavio Valente Asako Hattori
Nutrition and HIV/AIDS	Andrew Tomkins	Jos Perriens Stuart Gillespie Randa Saadeh Bruce Cogill
Nutrition of School Age Children	Judith McGuire Don Bundy Joy del Rosso Francisco Espejo	Arlene Mitchell Karin Lapping Lesley Drake Natalie Roschnik
Nutrition throughout the Life Cycle (earlier Consequences of Fetal and Infant Malnutrition, and Prevention of Foetal and Infant malnutrition)	Nevin Scrimshaw Jelka Zupan Ricardo Uauy	Ted Greiner Chizuru Nishida Ana Beatriz Vasconcellos
<b>Not now in operation</b>		
Iodine Deficiency Disorders	Graeme Clugston	Francoise Delange
Nutrition of Refugees and Displaced People	Rita Bhatia Anne Callahan	Judith Appleton
Vitamin A Deficiency	Joanne Csete	Martin Bloem
Iron Deficiency Control	Nevin Scrimshaw	Gary Gleason Rainer Gross Fernando Viteri Ray Yip



## Appendix 2 Publications: most of those issued by the SCN<sup>75</sup>

### A2.1 Reports on the world nutrition situation

ISSN 1810-715X

All issues are available online

*First Report on the World Nutrition Situation*, November 1987

*Supplement on Methods and Statistics to the First Report on the World Nutrition Situation*, December 1988

*Update on the Nutrition Situation, Recent Trends in Nutrition in 33 Countries*, January/February 1989

*Second Report on the World Nutrition Situation, Volume 1: Global and Regional Results*, October 1992

*Second Report on the World Nutrition Situation, Volume 2: Country Data*, March 1993

*Update on the Nutrition Situation: 1994*, November 1994

*Update on the Nutrition Situation: 1996*, November 1996

*Third Report on the World Nutrition Situation*, December 1997

*Fourth Report on the World Nutrition Situation: Nutrition Throughout the Life Cycle*, January 2000

*Fifth Report on the World Nutrition Situation: Nutrition for Improved Development Outcomes*, March 2004

*Sixth Report on the World Nutrition Situation*, forthcoming mid 2010

### A2.2 Nutrition policy papers

ISSN 1564-3778

All issues are available online

*Nutrition Education: A State-of-the-Art Review*, Robert C. Hornick, Jan 1985 (No. 1)

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<sup>75</sup> The author hopes that 'all' of the SCN publications are included but inevitably a few will have been missed, hence the 'most' in the title.

*Delivery of Oral Doses of Vitamin A to Prevent Vitamin A Deficiency and Nutritional Blindness*, Keith P. West Jr and Alfred Sommers, June 1987, reprinted June 1993 (No. 2)

*The Prevention and Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders*, Basel S. Hetzel, March 1988, reprinted June 1993 (No. 3)

*Women's Role in Food Chain Activities and their Implication for Nutrition*, Gerd Holmboe-Ottesen, Ophelia Mascarenhas, and Margareta Wandel, May, 1984 (No.4)

*Malnutrition and Infection: A Review*, A. Tomkins and F. Watson, October 1989, reprinted June 1993 (No. 5)

*Women and Nutrition*, background and papers presented at SCN Symposium held at UNICEF, New York, February 1989, October (No. 6)

*Appropriate Uses of Child Anthropometry*, report based on workshop held by ACC/SCN, June 1989, prepared and edited by G.H. Beaton, A. Kelly, J. Kevany, R. Martorell, and J. Mason, December, 1990 (No. 7)

*Managing Successful Nutrition Programmes*, report of ACC/SCN workshop held at IUNS meeting in Seoul, Korea, August 1989, edited by Joan Jennings, Stuart Gillespie, John Mason, Mahshid Lotfi, and Tom Scialfa, October 1990 (No. 8)

*Controlling Iron Deficiency*, report of an ACC/SCN workshop held in Trinity College, Dublin, June 1990, edited by Stuart Gillespie, John Kevany and John Mason, February, 1991 (No. 9)

*Nutrition-Relevant Actions: Some Experiences from the Eighties and Lessons for the Nineties*, book developed from the original background paper for the ACC/SCN ad hoc group meeting held in London in November 1990, prepared by Stuart Gillespie and John Mason, October, 1991 (No. 10)

*Nutrition and Population Links: Breastfeeding, Family Planning and Child Health*, papers from the ACC/SCN 18th Session Symposium held at UNFPA, New York, February 1991 (No. 11)

*Nutrition Issues in Food Aid*, report of a symposium held at the 19th session of the ACC/SCN in Rome, February, 1992, August 1993 (No. 12)

*Effectiveness of Vitamin A Supplementation in the Control of Young Child Morbidity and Mortality in Developing Countries*, G.H. Beaton, R. Martorell, K.J. Aronson, B. Edmonston, G. McCabe, A.C. Ross, B. Harvey, December 1993 (No. 14)

*Controlling Vitamin A Deficiency*, report based on ACC/SCN Consultative group meeting held in Ottawa, July 1993, prepared by Stuart Gillespie and John Mason January, 1994 (No. 14)

*How Nutrition Improves*, report based on ACC/SCN workshop held on 25–27 September 1993 at the 15th IUNS International congress on Nutrition, Adelaide, Australia, S. Gillespie, J. Mason, R. Martorell, July, 1996 (No. 15)

*Nutrition and Poverty*, papers from the ACC/SCN 24th Session Symposium, Kathmandu, March 1997, November 1997 (No. 16)

*Challenges for the 21st Century: A Gender Perspective*, papers for the ACC/SCN 25th Session Symposium, Oslo, Norway, March 1998 (No. 17)

*Low Birthweight*, a report based on the International Low Birthweight Symposium and Workshop held 14–17 June 1999, at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research in Dhaka, Bangladesh, June 1999 (No.18)

*What Works? A Review of the Efficacy and Effectiveness of Nutrition Interventions*, Lindsay Allen and Stuart Gillespie (No.19)

*Nutrition and HIV/AIDS*, report of the 28th Session Symposium, Nairobi, Kenya, April 2001 (No.20)

*Community Based Management of Severe Malnutrition in Children*, report of a meeting held 21–23 November 2005, Geneva, SCN Nutrition Policy Paper No 21, supplement to the UNU Food and Nutrition Bulletin

*Final Report to the SCN by the Commission on the Nutrition Challenges of the 21st Century – Ending Malnutrition by 2020: An Agenda for Change in the Millennium*

## **A2.3 SCN News**

ISSN 1564-3751

All issues are available online

A periodic review of developments in international nutrition compiled from information available to the SCN, published twice yearly. Contains features, news and views, programme news, and reviews of publications.

## **SCN Newsletter themes**

No	Date	Theme
1	March 1988	Vitamin A Deficiency, Urbanization
2	March 1988	World Nutrition Situation, Economic Adjustment
3	Early 1989	Does Cash Cropping Affect Nutrition?
4	Late 1989	Update on the Nutrition Situation
5	Early 1990	Nutrition and School Performance
6	Late 1990	Preventing Anaemia
7	Mid 1991	Refugee's Nutrition Crisis, Supplement to <i>SCN News</i> No 7: Some options for improving nutrition in the 1990s,
	May 1991	Extracts from <i>SCN News</i> : The Lesser Child

No	Date	Themes
8	Late 1992	Highlights of the World Nutrition Situation
9	Mid 1993	Focus on Micronutrients
10	Late 1993	Nutrition and Food Aid
11	Mid 1994	Maternal and Child Nutrition
12	Early 1995	The Role of Care in Nutrition – a Neglected Essential Ingredient
13	Late 1995	Behavioural Change and Nutrition Programmes; and Poor Nutrition and Chronic Diseases part 1
14	July 1997	The Nutrition Challenge in the 21st Century: What Role for the United Nations?
15	Dec 1997	Effective Programmes in Africa for Improving Nutrition, including Household Food Security
16	July 1998	Nutrition of the School-aged Child
17	Dec 1998	Nutrition and HIV/AIDS
18	July 1999	Adequate Food: A Human Right
19	Dec 1999	Nutrition and Ageing
20	July 2000	Nutrition and Agriculture
21	Dec 2000	Nutrition and the Environment
22	July 2001	Nutrition Goals and Targets
23	Dec 2001	Civil Society and the UN System
24	July 2002	Nutrition in the Context of Conflict and Crisis
25	Dec 2002	School-age Children: Their Health and Nutrition
26	July 2003	Mainstreaming Nutrition for Improved Development Outcomes
27	Dec 2003	Meeting the Challenge to Improve Complementary Feeding
28	July 2004	Nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals
29	Late 2004–early 2005	Overweight and Obesity: A New Nutritional Emergency?
30	Mid 2005	Closing the Gap on the Right to Adequate Food: The Voluntary Guidelines
31	Late 2005–early 2006	Adolescence: A Pivotal Stage in the Life Cycle
32	Mid 2006	Tackling the Double Burden of Malnutrition: A Global Agenda
33	Late 2006	Diet-related Chronic Disease and the Double Burden of Malnutrition in West Africa
34	Mid 2007	Working Together to Achieve Freedom from Child Hunger and Undernutrition
35	End 2007	Universal Salt Iodization (USI)
36	Mid 2008	Accelerating the Reduction of Maternal and Child Under Nutrition
37	Early 2009	Landscape Analysis on Countries' Readiness to Accelerate Action in Nutrition

## **A2.4 Nutrition information in crisis situations (formerly Refugee Nutrition Information Systems (RNIS))**

ISSN 1564-3778

All issues are available online

Report on the nutrition situation of all populations affected by a crisis (such as refugees, displaced and resident populations). Published every three months with a summary of the reports sent by email before the full printed report is posted.

## **A2.5 SCN country case studies**

All studies are available online

*Nutrition in India*, V. Reddy, M. Shekar, P. Rao and Stuart Gillespie, December 1992

*Economic Growth, Equity and Nutritional Improvement in Indonesia*, I. Tarwotjo Soekirman, I. Jus'at, G. Sumodiningrat and F. Jalal, December 1992

*Nutrition and Health in Thailand: Trends and Actions*, Y. Kavchondham, P. Wiichagoon, K. Tontisirin, December, 1992

*Nutrition-Relevant Actions in Tanzania*, F.P. Kavishe and S.S. Mushi April, 1993

*The Improvement in Child Nutritional Status in Brazil: How Did it Occur?*, R.F. lunes and C.A. Montiero, September, 1993

*Nutrition Relevant Actions in Zimbabwe*, J. Tagwireyi, T. Jayne and N. Lenneiye, December 1992

## **A2.6 SCN briefing notes**

### **Nutrition: A Foundation for Development**

A compilation of briefs on the latest research findings in nutrition as they relate to other development sectors. The briefs are designed to facilitate dialogue between nutrition and other development professionals. They are organised both as a complete set or as stand-alone briefs that make the case for integrating nutrition into the work of the development community.

Available in English and in Spanish, as hard copy briefs, or in PDF or PowerPoint format.

### **Global recession increases malnutrition for the most vulnerable people in developing countries. Pregnant women and children are hardest hit.**

The SCN has developed a briefing note on the nutrition impacts of the global financial and food crises.

## A2.7 SCN-sponsored activities, published elsewhere

'Supplementary Feeding Programs for Young Children in Developing Countries', G.H. Beaton and H. Ghassemi, *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 35 (Supplement): 864–916. 1982. This is the report of a study commissioned by the ACC/SCN.

'International Conference on Iron Deficiency and Behavioral Development', E. Pollitt, J. Haas, D.A. Levitsky (ed.) *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 50 (Supplement): 565–705, 1989. The ACC/SCN was a major sponsor of the meeting along with UNU and INACG.

*Nutritional Surveillance*, J.B. Mason, J.-P. Habicht, H. Tabatabai, V. Valverde, World Health Organization, 1984. This book is based on a background document for an International Workshop on Nutritional Surveillance held in Cali in 1991. The workshop was co-sponsored by the ACC/SCN.

## A2.8 People and publications: Abraham Horwitz Memorial Lectures

(Lectures are available online)

The Dr Abraham Horwitz lectures were established by the SCN in 1996, with the aim of continuing Dr Horwitz' valued and generous tradition of mentoring young talent and their ideas for nutrition programmes. Each year a young guest lecturer (with the occasional exception) with knowledge and commitment was invited to make a presentation at the Annual Session. It has been an innovative and successful feature for involving young persons in the UN at the beginning of their professional careers.

Date	Speaker and affiliation	Title
24th Session in Kathmandu, March 1997	Dr S.R. Osmani, University of Ulster	Poverty and Nutrition in South Asia
25th Session in Oslo, March 1998	Ms Isatou Jallow Semenga-Janneh, Nutrition Unit, Ministry of Health, Banjul, Gambia, now Chief, Gender, Mother and Child Health Service, WFP	Breastfeeding: from Biology to Policy
26th Session in Geneva, April 1999	Ms Brigit Toebes, then PhD student at Netherlands Institute of Human Rights at Utrecht University, now Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen.	Human Rights, Health and Nutrition
27th Session in Washington DC, April 2000	Ms Deepa Bhat, Masters student at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University	What Makes the Difference? Applying the Positive Deviance Approach to Improve Pregnancy Outcomes
28th Session in Nairobi, April 2001	Dr Lucy Thairu, PhD student in International Nutrition, Cornell University, now Post Doctoral Research Fellow, Stanford University	Infant Feeding Options for Mothers with HIV: Using Women's Insights to Guide Policies

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speaker and affiliation</b>	<b>Title</b>
29th Session in Berlin, March 2002	Ms Soha Moussa, Masters student at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University	School Feeding in Crisis and Conflict
30th Session in Chennai, March 2003	Dr Purnima Menon, Cornell University, now Research Fellow, IFPRI	Bringing Nutrition into the Political and Technical Mainstream: The Role of Effective Communication
31st Session in New York, March 2004	Ms Susan J. Keino, Maseno University, Kenya	Nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals: A Kenyan Perspective on the Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger
32nd Session in Brasilia, March 2005	Ms Kaia Engesveen, Post graduate student, Department of Nutrition, University of Oslo, now SCN Secretariat, Geneva	Strategies for Realizing Human Rights to Health and Care of Infants and Young Children in Supports of the Millennium Development Goals – Role and Capacity Analysis of Responsible Actors in Relation to Breastfeeding in the Maldives
33rd Session in Geneva, March 2006	Ms Camila Corvalan, University of Chile/Emory University	Latin America – Avoiding the Nutrition Transition Trap
34th Session in Rome, March 2007	Ms Charlotte Dufour, Household Food Security and Nutrition Advisor, FAO Afghanistan	Building National Nutrition Coordination from the Field Up: Lessons Learned from the Afghanistan Reconstruction
35th Session in Hanoi, March 2008	Mr Alan Berg, retired World Bank Official	Reflections from the Front Lines: Swimming Upstream with Optimism: A survey of the International Community



## Appendix 3: Timeline of the SCN

Date	What happened
April 1977	SCN established by ECOSOC
Sept 1977	1st session in Rome under the chair of Mr G. Kermode
Dec 1977	2nd Session in Rome under the chair of Mr R. Heyward
March 1978	3rd Session in Rome
June 1978	Dr Leslie Burgess joins as Technical Secretary
Oct 1978	4th Session in New York
Feb 1979	5th Session in Geneva
Feb 1980	6th Session in Paris
March 1981	7th Session in Rome
Feb 1982	8th Session in Bangkok: Robert Muscat invited to outline new roles for SCN
June 1982	Nutrition News Service initiated
Mar 1983	9th Session in Copenhagen: Muscat Report presented and then Sol Chafkin reviews the first seven years of the SCN
Mar 1984	10th Session in Rome under the chair of Mr M. Mensah
Feb 1985	11th Session in Nairobi
Aug 1985	Dr Burgess steps down as Technical Secretary
Oct 1985	Grottaferrata Retreat
April 1986	12th Session in Tokyo under chair of Dr A. Horwitz, with Symposium on adjustment
July 1986	Dr John Mason joins as Technical Secretary
Aug 1986	Professor Habicht steps down as Chair of AGN
Dec 1986	Washington DC Ad Hoc Working Group on nutrition research priorities
Feb 1987	AGN meeting research needed on emerging problems such as obesity strokes and certain cancers, arteriosclerosis
Mar 1987	13th Session in Washington
Sep 1987	Professor Kevany appointed as chair of AGN
Dec 1987	First Report on the World Nutrition Situation issued
Feb 1988	14th Session Geneva, theme was on cash cropping
Feb 1989	15th Session at New York, Symposium on 'Women and Nutrition'. ICN was proposed.
1989	Workshop at IUNS in Seoul: Managing Successful Nutrition Programmes
Feb 1990	16th Session at UNESCO: Paris with symposium on 'Nutrition and School Performance'. Calls made for estimation of external resource flow for nutrition.
July 1990	Special 17th Session held to discuss ICN, the only year in which two full sessions were held

Nov 1990	Professor Martorell appointed as chair of AGN
Nov 1990	Ad Hoc meeting on Policies to Alleviate Underconsumption and Malnutrition in Deprived Areas
Feb 1991	18th Session in New York
Feb 1992	19th Session in Rome
Jul 1992	Oslo meeting to establish World Alliance for Nutrition and human rights
Oct 1992	Second Report on the World Nutrition Report published
Dec 1992	ICN, 5–11 December
Feb 1993	20th Session at Geneva, held with Micronutrient Forum
Feb 1993	RNIS started on recommendation of SCN's WG on nutrition of refugees and displaced people
Mar 1994	21st Session, UNICEF New York AGN issued statement on World Food problem. Symposium was on Behavioural Change and Nutrition programmes.
May 1994	Inaugural meeting of the WANAHR at Innocenti
Jun 1995	Professor Martorell steps down as Chair of AGN
Sep 1995	Dr Horwitz steps down as Chair (from 1986), Dr Richard Jolly becomes Chair
March 1995	22nd Session: at PAHO, Washington DC: Symposium on Nutrition in the Epidemiology and Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes mellitus and Obesity in Developing Countries
Feb 1996	Dr Tagwireyi appointed as Chair of the AGN
March 1996	23rd Session in Accra: Symposium on Effective Programmes in Africa for Improving Nutrition, including Household Food Security
July 1996	Dr John Mason steps down
Nov 1996	World Food Summit FAO Rome
Feb 1997	Dr Sonya Rabeneck joins as Technical Secretary
March 1997	24th Session in Kathmandu, Symposium on Nutrition and Poverty Set up Commission on Nutrition in the 21st Century
July 1997	Professor Uauy appointed Chair of AGN
Mar 1998	25th Session in Oslo: 21st anniversary: Nutrition 21 Commission; 1998 Abraham Horwitz lectures initiated; Third Report World Nutrition Situation; symposium on 'Challenges for the 21st Century: A Gender Perspective on Nutrition Through the Life Cycle'
1999	26th Session: Human Rights to adequate food UNHCHR, Geneva: this had the 3rd Horwitz lecture. AGN put into abeyance, and the Steering Group developed the Strategic Plan.
1999	AGN disbanded
April 1999	26th Session in Geneva
Dec 1999	4th Report World Nutrition Situation
Mar 2000	'Ending Malnutrition by 2020: An Agenda for Change in the Millennium' Final Report to the ACC/SCN by the commission on the Nutrition Challenges of the 21st Century, a meeting held in Chennai courtesy of M.S. Swaminathan chaired by Professor Philip James

April 2000	27th Session Washington DC, UNICEF and World Bank 'Nutrition Stocktaking and Challenges for the 21st Century', organised by Interim programme Steering Committee (IPSC). Strategic Plan was adopted by acclamation. Established WG on Nutrition and HIV/AIDS.
Jan 2001	Namanga Ngongi takes over as Chair
April 2001	28th Session in Nairobi, Kenya, WFP. Symposium on Nutrition and HIV/AIDS. Bilateral parallel meeting included staff from ministries of aid receiving countries: Gambia, Kenya, Mali and South Africa, this follows change in 'definition' of bilateral
Oct 2001	The SCN becomes accountable to the CEB and is re-named as the SCN
Mar 2002	29th Annual Session in Berlin, Germany BMZ, DSE and GTZ; Nutrition in the context of crisis and conflict. SCN becomes Standing Committee on Nutrition; advocacy briefs launched
April 2002	Mid Term Evaluation by Eileen Kennedy
Aug 2002	Catherine Bertini appointed as new Chair
Mar 2003	30th Session at Chennai: Symposium on Mainstreaming Nutrition to Improve Development Outcomes
July 2003	Dr Sonya Rabeneck steps down as Secretary
Jan 2004	Tivoli Retreat
Mar 2004	31st Session UN NY: Nutrition and the MDGs; Fifth Report on World Nutrition Situation Tivoli Retreat proposals put on the agenda
July 2004	Dr Roger Shrimpton appointed as Technical Secretary
Mar 2005	32nd Session Brasilia, Nutrition and MDGs in context of right to food. First time that national and international meeting discussing similar themes were run in parallel.
June 2005	ECOSOC with SCN held a special information meeting in NY on 'Critical Role of Nutrition for Reaching the MDGs', in preparation for the Sept 2005 Millennium +5 High Level Plenary of the UN general assembly, 2005 Summit. This was the first ECOSOC/SCN Session.
Nov 2005	WHO/UNICEF/SCN meeting on severely malnourished children to be treated at community level
Mar 2006	33rd Session Geneva WHO: Symposium on Nutrition and the Double Burden of Disease: A Global Challenge
Aug 2006	Ms Ann Veneman is appointed as new Chair
Feb 2007	34th Session in Rome: Theme was 'Working Together to Achieve Freedom from Hunger and Child Malnutrition'
Mar 2008	35th Session in Hanoi: Theme was 'Accelerating Reduction of Maternal and Child Under Nutrition'
Dec 2008	Dr Roger Shrimpton steps down as Technical Secretary. Ms A. Veneman steps down as Chair. Alexander Mueller, Assistant DG, FAO appointed as new Chair.

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